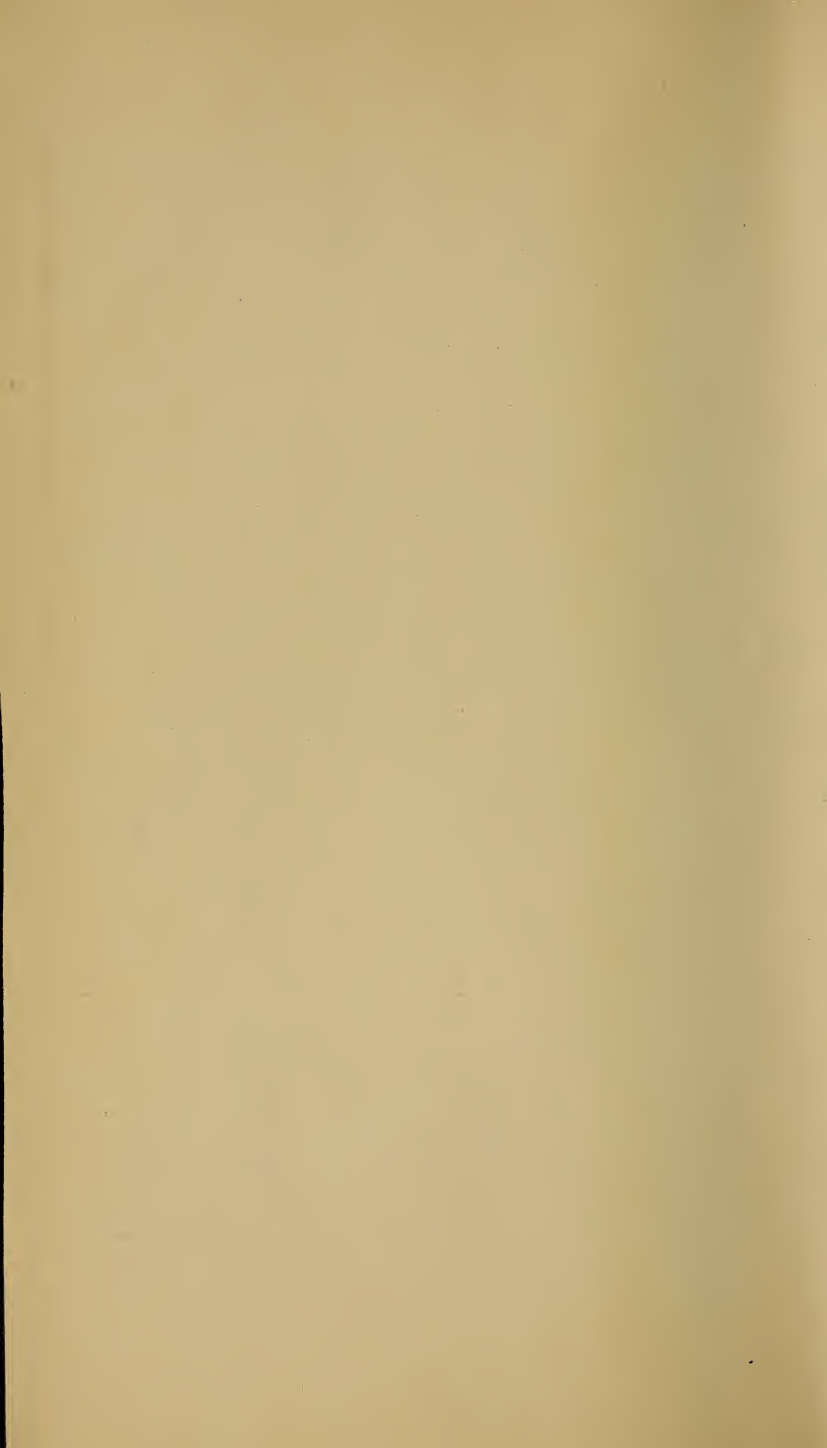


CENTENARY BIOGRAPHY,



LEWIS W. TOWNSEND.





OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

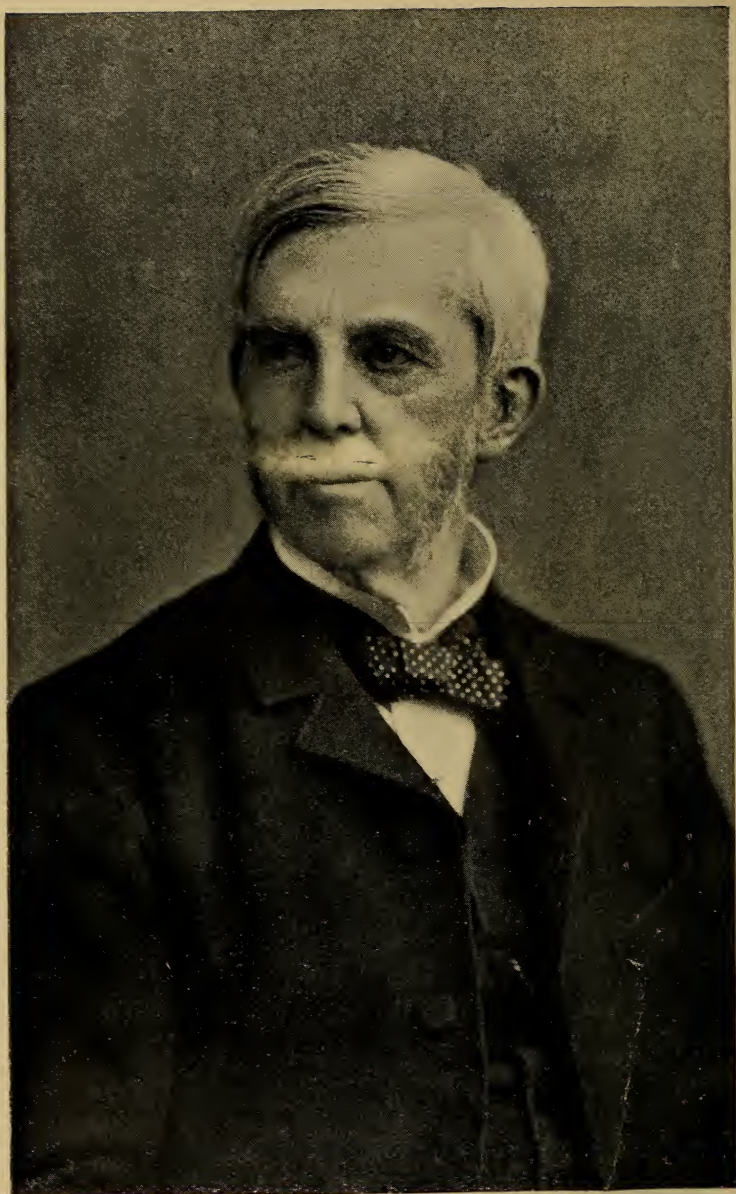


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OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

[Elliot & Fry.

Centenary Biography

Oliver Wendell Holmes

BY

LEWIS W. TOWNSEND

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PREFACE.

To an increasing number of people Oliver Wendell Holmes is the author of the "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table," and it is chiefly to readers of this class that this biography is offered, as giving a brief narrative of his life and a critical estimate of his work sufficient to indicate his striking appeal to his own generation and his interest to ours.

No exhaustive treatment of his works is required; he saw rather than foresaw; he apprehended what his age was seeking to teach, and delivered a message that was almost intuitively accepted by the generation following his own,—to which it belonged as a birthright.

But his reputation must depend not upon any lessons he taught, however important these were, and whether they have been learned or not, but upon his fine and even unique literary gift. Oliver Wendell Holmes will always remain an important figure in literary history from his having adventured—consciously or unconsciously—into a new country, and established his lordship there.

In preparing this volume I have been particularly indebted to the official biography by Mr. Morse, the monograph on Oliver Wendell Holmes by W. Jerrold, and an excellent article in the *Quarterly Review* of 1895.

L.W.T.

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CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNING OF THINGS.

Know old Cambridge? Hope you do.
Born there? Don't say so! I was, too.
Born in a house with a gambrel-roof,—
Standing still, if you must have proof,—
("Gambrel? Gambrel?" Let me beg,
You'll look at a horse's hinder leg;
First great angle above the hoof,
That's the gambrel: hence gambrel-roof.)
Nicest place that ever was seen.

—*The Professor of the Breakfast Table.*

"WE can die out of many houses, but the house itself can die but once, and so real is the life of a house to one who has dwelt in it—more especially the life of a house which held him in dreamy infancy; in restless boyhood; in passionate youth—so real, I say, is its life that it seems as if something like a soul of it must outlast its perishing frame."

Oliver Wendell Holmes was getting grey when he wrote this, and nearing the age he so swiftly attains and keeps in our minds; but it was of the old gambrel-roofed house where he was

born that he was thinking, when he wrote in this vein of tender reminiscence; the house that so haunted his imagination in later life, and seemed so to colour all his impressions that it has become of more than ordinary biographical interest.

It stood in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which was no more than a country village in Oliver Wendell Holmes' early days—"with large, open woodland spaces. As the seat of the oldest University in America it preserved in its atmosphere some of the cloistered quiet and intellectual repose that reminded Clough of Oxford. Its few towers rose above elms, lindens and horse-chestnuts, which had seen Massachusetts a colony. Through its green and purple salt marshes the Charles River slipped smoothly to the sea."

The house itself was rich in associations. General Ward made it his headquarters during the early part of the Revolution; Washington was frequently seen there in consultation with his officers; in one of its rooms "Bunker's Hill" was planned and discussed, and the floor was dented with the butts of the muskets of the soldiery; in another Warren slept on the night preceding that battle, and President Langdon prayed God's blessing on the issue.

Associations of another kind, perhaps, more deeply impressed themselves upon Oliver, and

evoke our interest. The portrait of his great-grandmother, Dorothy Q——, disfigured by the British rapier, hung from the walls, and in the parlour was the chair in which Lord Percy sat to have his hair dressed.

The honest mansion made no pretensions. "Accessible, companionable, holding its hand out to all, comfortable, respectable, and even in its way dignified, but not imposing," although the atmosphere created by those who lived in it may almost be so characterised. We have a sense of that old-world and somewhat heavy refinement and culture as we read of the books, the dark furniture, the claw-footed chairs, and the family silver.

The rooms were low-pitched, but spacious, lending a sense of freedom to those who dwelt in them; but the garrets, which so often figure in Oliver Wendell Holmes' reminiscences, and which he says are so like the sea shore where wrecks are thrown up and slowly go to pieces, deserve mention as making the first discovery, since authenticated, of his poetical temperament.

Behind the house "was the backyard, with its woodhouse, its carriage-house, its barn, and—let me not forget—its pigstye," and to one side was the field of four acres, which, to his childish apprehension, seemed of such vast extent, while on the other side smiled

the old-fashioned garden, where grew the lilac, the scent of which, whenever it drifted to him in youth, or manhood, or old age, was fraught with power to carry him back to the old house and other days, with or without his willing it.

From the western window he could look out over the vast expanse of common where stood the "Washington" elm, "under whose shadow the great leader first drew his sword at the head of an American army," and, in the great distance, "the hills of the horizon" stood up like gigantic figures on whom the sun and the clouds lay.

It was from this centre, as he says, that he felt his way into the creations beyond, and it was in the house we have been speaking of that he was born in that memorable year 1809, which also gave birth to Tennyson, Darwin, Poe, Mendelssohn, Lincoln, and was the centenary of the birth of Dr. Johnson. In this home he remained until his maturity, and gained his first great experience of love, of death and of remorse, in addition to the many impressions that tended to make him a poet, or came to him because he was one.

Of his ancestors he himself always spoke with pride, and although he had no liking for hunting among ancestral remains, he had a very pronounced preference for the man who inherits family traditions and family

portraits, "and the cumulative humanities of at least four or five generations," and he liked to remember that he was descended from families of worthy and even notable association, and prided himself upon his kinship with Dorothy Q—— of Norman descent, and Mrs. Bradstreet, the wife of one of the early governors of Massachusetts, and the first poetess of her country.

On his mother's side he was of Dutch descent.

Fair Cousin Wendell P——

Our ancestors were dwellers beside the Zuyder Zee.
Both Grotius and Erasmus were countrymen of we,
And Vondel was our namesake, though he spelt it
with a V,

and from his father he was descended from a Puritan family of consideration, who settled in Connecticut in the seventeenth century, of which he speaks in a letter to Emra Holmes.

"My own great-great-grandfather was one of the first settlers of the town of Woodstock, Conn., where my father was born. He probably carried an axe on his shoulders, and thought himself lucky if he could keep his scalp on his crown. His grandson—my grandfather—fought the French and Indians in Canada in what he used to call 'the old French War,' the same in which Wolfe fell, and in which Admiral Sir Robert Holmes took part."

This early settler was one John Holmes, who was spoken of as a useful man, and soon became a prosperous one. His son David is known to us as Deacon Holmes, and his son as an army captain and surgeon, and the grandfather of Oliver Wendell Holmes.

Abiel Holmes—the father of Oliver—married as his second wife in 1801, Sarah Wendell, the daughter of the Hon. Oliver Wendell, of Boston, who became the mother of Oliver on August 29th, 1809.

So much it is necessary to remark with respect to the genealogy of the subject of this memoir, but something must be said about the character of his parents.

The Rev. Abiel Holmes came from the land of steady habits, and from a lineage of stern Puritans. He early became “imbued with the doctrines of Calvinism,” but his kindly nature ameliorated the rigour of his creed, and though he was a little “dour” in the pulpit, he was noted as the most delightful of sunny old men.

He had entered upon his ministry of the First Congregational Church in Cambridge two years before his third child—Oliver Wendell—was born, and won more than the usual tribute of respect from his congregation and neighbours. He possessed all the qualifications required of those who would hope to be admired,

and he was a much admired man. He was a minister; an author of some reputation, writing poetry (which did not bring reputation) and the "Annals of America," which is mentioned as a careful, accurate, and useful history; in addition he was a very handsome man, as his portrait gives sufficient evidence of, and the story goes that when he first settled at Cambridge the girls used to say, "There goes Holmes! Look!" He was certainly a man to inspire respect rather than affection, even on the part of his children, and this quotation from a letter which he wrote to his son when he was away at school, gives, in addition to a breath of the rigorous atmosphere of the times, an insight into the character of Abiel Holmes, almost frigid in its reserve, that we could not obtain by description.

MY DEAR SON,

We received your letter of the 30th Dec., and thank you for the wish of a Happy New Year. We cordially reciprocate the wish, and our desire is that you may improve your time and talents, and be attaining those virtues and graces which will make all time pleasant and profitable to you. . . . Your opportunities for improvement are very much greater than those of most others, and we shall expect the more accordingly. Be diligent in your studies, punctual in your attendance at the Academy, and strictly observant of its rules. . . . Be prudent. Be more particular when you next write, and let us know all about you.

And the story is not without interest to us here, which tells that later in life Dr. Holmes found an old almanac of his father's on which the date of his birth had been signalled by the undemonstrative and scarcely sufficient note—"son b."

Dr. Holmes owed much in the shaping of his character to his father, but perhaps he was more indebted to his mother for the distinguishing qualities of his intellect. She was a woman of a large, emotional nature, gentle and sympathetic, fond of social intercourse and able to enter into another's mood, glad to dance to another's piping, and ready to weep with those that wept. She possessed the qualities that endear, and more than one of her acquaintances has left a tribute to her gentle and cheerful nature and a record of the love they bore her—"like that for my own mother," says Dr. Wyman, in writing to Oliver Wendell Holmes.

The son of such parents, born into the home we have described, and brought up in an atmosphere of culture and comfort, he had a right to be grateful, as he said, for "a probable inheritance of good instincts and a good name."

It is always important to review the earliest years of one whose character and work we would understand, but when that one happens

to be a poet, these earliest years become all-important, and though it has often been said that there was nothing in the boyhood and youth of Oliver Wendell Holmes to indicate unusual gifts, the statement is not quite true, as the intensity of the impressions that certain events and sensations produced in him indicates a very susceptible nature, and the kind of event and sensation that left the deepest impress indicate the poetic temperament. We all retain certain impressions of our childhood, and can reproduce these as facts in after life, but these records stain themselves into the poet's memory, and when he recalls them it is in colour, or song, and with a tremulous emotion. "What strains and strophes of unwritten verse pulsate through my soul when I open a certain closet in the ancient house where I was born!" and many similar ejaculations indicate how haunting were some of his recollections.

The sound of the sea that many miles away sobbed herself to sleep against the heedless cliffs after a night of storm;—the dreary music of the creaking wood-sleds trailing their loads of oak and walnut over the complaining snow;—the "pulsating lullaby of the evening crickets" that was associated in his mind with the stillness and solemnity of the commencement of the Sabbath Day. Then

the row of tall poplars had for him a sepulchral aspect, and the tall masts of the ships a dread appearance, that made him run and cover his eyes from the sight of them. Again the scents of certain flowers ravished him, and often imagination went before to meet a promise, and spoiled for him the fulfilment. These thwarting recollections of beauty or pain, so trifling as scarcely to warrant mention of them, are enough to show us that he was not quite an ordinary child; the character and intensity of the impression recalled alike indicate the poetic type of mind that must have received them.

His childhood, however, was not given up to these sensations, and "the triumphal entry of the governor attended by a light horse troop" had the same attraction for him which "the pomp and circumstance of glorious war" has for most boys, as had also the celebration of the Declaration of Peace in 1815, when he threw up his "jocky" with other boys from the Dame School, and shouted "Hurraw for Ameriky," and when the day was made notable for him by the illumination of the Colleges and the privilege of sitting up as late as he liked.

He recalls, too, with considerable feeling, his timorousness as a child. Even when he had arrived at maturity he said he would not

sleep in a solitary house for a small fortune, and as a child his nervous apprehensions constituted a real body of dread and caused him much suffering, and marred a good deal of his childish enjoyment. He was afraid of the dark, and afraid of the Devil, and listened with fearfulness to local reports of that inscrutable enemy's designs. In addition to these two giants of terror that pursued him there were ghosts in the garret, and Dr. Gamage prescribed ipecacuanha.

At an early age Oliver was sent to school, and received his first instruction from Dame Prentiss, who "ruled" over young children in the "low studded schoolroom," but at the age of ten he had outgrown this teaching, and took his place among the boys of Cambridgeport school where he had for fellow-pupils R. Dana, who wrote "The Buccaneer," and Margaret Fuller, who became so remarkable a woman, and was almost worshipped by the transcendental mystics, and figures as the Miranda of Lowell's "Fable for Critics."

Speaking of these schooldays in his autobiographical notes, Dr. Holmes says, "I do not remember being the subject of any reproof or discipline at that school, although I do not doubt I deserved it, for I was an inveterate whisperer at every school I attended," but he remembers the master tapping him on the

forehead with his pencil, and saying, "He couldn't help it if I would do so well"—an encouragement which he never forgot.

He left Cambridgeport at the age of fifteen, and our impression of him at this time is of a healthy boy with the usual boyish habits and pleasures. He could use his jack-knife as well as another, could skate, and was fond of sport—shooting at everything that was worth a charge of the smallest shot he could employ in his old flint-lock musket; he was sharper than most, and certainly had a greater proclivity for reading, as we shall see, but his upbringing might well account for his habits in this direction, as he was bumped among books from his earliest days, and became as intimate with them as a stable-boy with his horses, to use his own illustration.

During these early years he was subject to two other educational influences of great importance, which he emphasises in his notes, and frequently mentions in his own works. His father's library consisted of some two thousand volumes, and included a great many standard works in addition to theology and sermons. Oliver grew to feel at home among books from his earliest days, and the influence of his early reading is noticeable in his poetry of a later day, but his habits of reading were peculiar, and form a striking commentary

upon the writings by which we know him best, and which appear not so much "books," but rather chapters from many books he might have written. "I read few books through," Dr. Holmes says in speaking of his childhood; "I have always read *in* books rather than *through* them, and always with more profit from the books I have read in, than from the books I read through."

Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" appealed to his imagination, and he always speaks of it with due appreciation as a work of art, but it had a unique effect upon his thinking, and one contrary to the author's intention, as it "made the system of which it was the exponent more unreasonable and more repulsive instead of rendering it more attractive," and a like effect was produced by the study of Scott's Family Bible. "The narrowness and exclusiveness of his views waked me up more than anything else to the enormities of the creed which he represented." As a matter of fact, Oliver Wendell Holmes early revolted, not from Christianity, but from the harsh, and in some respects, cruel representation of it which the Calvinism of the New England of his day offered, and he was more precocious in his inquiring and independent attitude toward religion than in anything else.

No doubt Bunyan and Scott did influence him in the manner he describes, but there were other and larger forces at work influencing the general mind of the time, and leading in a similar direction. The accident of Dr. Holmes' birth and upbringing early brought him under their influence, and we must not forget that the spirit of the times and the growing impatience of many with New England Calvinism, rather than his reading of Bunyan and Scott, account for his revolt from what he calls "the inherited servitude of my ancestors."

There were books, however, allowed him which engaged his mind in other directions. Rees' Encyclopædia was a book to suit his peculiar habits of reading, and his preference for "confused feeding"; a copy of Dryden, brutally expurgated by the summary process of tearing out the leaves, fell into his hands; Pope's "Homer" charmed him in childhood as well as in old age, and before he could write he remembers singing his own heroic couplets made in imitation of Gray and Pope and Dryden.

These works, and the "Galaxy of American Poets," which contained poems by Bryant, among others, are the most noteworthy of those he mentions as influencing his early years. The list is not long, nor particularly noteworthy, but it is interesting to remark

that there is more than the usual relation between his early reading and the works of his maturity.

The other influence to which he owed a good deal was due to his father's ministerial calling, in consequence of which Oliver met many of that profession who left more than a passing impression upon him.

"Some of my pleasantest Sundays were those when I went with my father who was exchanging pulpits with a neighbouring clergyman. We jogged off together in one of the old-fashioned, two-wheeled chaises. The clergymen with whom my father exchanged in those days were weak in the theological joints," and consequently, as he thought, pleasanter men. Both when he went with his father and when he stayed at home he was in the company of ministers, and with the quick, instinctive way of children, discovered them to be of two classes. There were those who preached as dying men to dying men, and those who spoke as living men to living men, and Oliver had a distinct preference for the latter, probably because they could play with children even on Sundays, and brought a sunny atmosphere with them, in striking contrast to the gloom and foreboding that stalked in dark companionship with some of the other class.

It seems probable that Oliver's father would have been pleased to see him embrace the ministry, and at school at Andover he was under influence that led many to follow that calling. One may be glad, however, that he escaped with his life and humour from a profession that he had no right to, and it is meet that a tribute of thanks be offered to that minister who looked and talked so like an undertaker, and in consequence seems to have acted as a strong deterrent upon Oliver, and guarded the gates of his profession against him.

But it would be unfair to suggest that the majority were of this type, or that the impression left by these few "wailing poittrinaires" was of the deepest. Writing more than half a century later, Dr. Holmes says,

"How grandly the procession of the old clergymen who filled our pulpit from time to time and passed the day under our roof, marches before my closed eyes! At their head the most venerable David Osgood, with massive front and shaggy, over-shadowing eyebrows. Following in the train mild-eyed John Foster, with the lambent aurora of a smile about his mouth which not even the Sabbath could subdue. . . . It was a real delight to have one of these good, hearty,

happy, benignant old clergymen pass the Sunday with us, and I can remember some whose advent made the day feel almost like 'Thanksgiving.' "

One incident must be referred to before leaving his childhood. In all ages there have been men capable of complete change from a word, a book, a look, an act striking into their life from the external world, and something like a revolution took place in Oliver when, as he says, " I paid ten cents for a peep through the telescope on the Common, and saw the transit of Venus. . . . I have never got over the shock of my discovery. There are some things we believe but do not know ; there are others that we know, but in our habitual state of mind hardly believe. I knew something of the relative size of the planets. . . . The Earth on which I lived has never been the same to me since that time. All my human sentiments, all my religious beliefs, all my conception of my relation in space for fractional rights in the Universe seemed to have undergone a change."

This experience, for it seems to have been such, perhaps first determined his mind in a direction that led him eventually to rest in the belief that " this colony of the Universe is an educational institution as far as the human race is concerned," and to this theory he clung,

and upon it he based his hope for himself and his fellow-men.

At the age of fifteen, "genial, joyous, sound in health, buoyant in spirit, and with the keenest zest for life," he took a step into a larger world, and left home to continue his education at Philip's Academy, Andover. The songs his mother had sung to him were still echoing in his mind. "The blue sky overhead, the green expanse under foot, the scenery and orchestra of Nature as yet uninterpreted by language," had sunk into his consciousness and was doing its work quietly and unbeknown to him, while other influences we have mentioned were, perhaps, more active if more superficial in their effect.

He only remained one year at Andover, but his affection was sufficient to make him write an account of a visit which he paid his old school late in life, where he says,

"The ghost of a boy was at my side as I wandered among the places he knew so well. I went to the front of the house, there was the great rock showing its broad back,—'I used to crack nuts on that,' whispered the small ghost. I looked in at the upper window,—'I looked out of that on four changing seasons,' said the ghost."

Philip's Academy at Andover was only the stepping-stone to the University, but the

friendship he formed with Phineas Barnes while there, and which he retained during his whole life, is valuable to us as it led to a correspondence which affords us the little information we have about Dr. Holmes in his undergraduate days.

He entered Harvard in 1825, and graduated in 1829, thus becoming a member of the famous class of '29, which included so many remarkable men—B. R. Curtis, George T. Bigelow, and, above all, James Freeman Clark.

Class patriotism was a ruling prejudice of the day. The opinion of the class on public matters was important to its members, and the well-being of each member was a matter of concern to all the others, even long after they had gone their various ways in the world.

Oliver Wendell Holmes was loyal to his class all his life. It was a delight and a source of pride that he was a member of so distinguished a body. He attended the annual festivals and read his poems on those occasions during a long number of years, and he lingered on to that time when the forty or fifty who met together in 1829 had dwindled down to two or three venerable old men who gathered at Dr. Holmes' house for social talk. There was "no poem" at these last meetings, but, as one of the survivors wrote, "something very like tears."

The last poem he wrote for his classmates was "The Curfew":—

The play is over. While the light
 Yet lingers in the darkening hall,
 I come to say a last Good-night
 Before the final—Exeunt all!

So ends "The Boys"—a life-long play.
 We too must hear the Prompter's call
 To fairer scenes and brighter day.
 Farewell! I let the curtain fall!

What we know of his life at Harvard is gathered chiefly from his letters to Phineas Barnes, and the most notable thing about the correspondence is that he was always behind-hand with it, and always ready with an apology for his desultory habits. Probably he in his new sphere, like Dorothy Temple in London, always found something going to keep him idle.

He gives in one or two letters to his friend a circumstantial account of his appearance at this time. He bids him not to expect to find him a bearded son of Anak, but a short youth with a smooth face, standing five feet three inches when helpfully shod; he wears his "gills" erect, dresses his hair with attention, and buttons his coat a little tighter than heretofore. In addition he has acquired a bass voice; smokes devoutly; writes and even

publishes poetry; and, above all, has given up talking sentiment. But, with all these alterations and accomplishments he genially admits that there is one thing lacking—perhaps more—he still looks between a man and a boy.

This brief sketch he gives us, and the letters to Phineas Barnes at this period indicate that he went the way of all flesh when the somewhat rigid restraints of home were exchanged for the life of a College—he enjoyed his independence, and College suppers, and indulged his vanity a little. What does surprise us is that he wrote patronisingly to his friend, and took himself rather seriously in a sense that we should hardly expect in one who developed such a rare gift of humour.

There was nothing in his College life that we gather from these letters to suggest that his fellows regarded him as a marked man, or that he felt himself peculiarly endowed. He was chosen Class Poet over the head of James Freeman Clark, who became his most attached friend, but few of Oliver Wendell Holmes' early poems are remarkable in any degree, and he himself was critic enough in later years to forbid their republication.

College life was like a new world to him. In his Autobiographical Notes he says, "It was a great change from the sober habits of

a quiet clergyman's family to the festive indulgences and gay licence of a convivial club."

"The supper-table and the theatre seemed lively as compared with Saurin's sermons and the Assembly's Catechism," and this other extract is interesting and indicates what a great change has come over our opinion with regard to the use of alcoholic stimulants:—

"I remember on the occasion of my having an exhibition that, with the consent of my parents, I laid in a considerable stock [of wine], and that my room was for several days the seat of continuous revelry."

But the change in his manner of living is not the most important consideration in speaking of his University days. Oliver Wendell Holmes was not the kind of youth to lose his head and waste his time because a little more freedom and a little more money was allowed him than heretofore. "I have been growing a little in body, and, I hope, in mind; I have been learning a little of almost everything, and a good deal of some things,"—he writes to his friend, and he was subject to influences that were to affect his whole outlook in certain directions, and particularly to those influences which were beginning to turn the tide against Calvinistic orthodoxy. He was always a reverent and a religious man, and his later writings are full of discussions on religious

questions, but it was at Harvard that his religious views first began to take independent shape, and he began to get out of the "old harness," as he says.

After graduating in 1829 he had still to choose a profession, and seemed to have no very decided preference in the matter. Authorship, Medicine and Law all engaged his attention. Authorship he had tried while at Harvard, and had even had his first attack of what he calls "author's lead-poisoning," but he did not seriously contemplate the profession as one for himself to choose as the means of earning a living. He writes to his friend,—“I am totally undecided what to study. It will be the Law or Physic, for I cannot say that I think the trade of authorship quite adapted to this meridian,” and in the end he chose Law, or rather coquetted with it for a year, entering the Dane School, and studying under Mr. Ashmun and Judge Story, but his attempts to digest Blackstone and Chitty were very perfunctory, and the writing of poetry was a great hindrance to the study of the Law, so that at the end of his experimental year he abandoned the profession without regret, and with but a poor opinion of it, for he writes again to his friend,—“If you would wax thin and savage like a half-fed spider, be a lawyer,” and in the “Professor” he says,—

“ The business of a lawyer is as unsympathetic as Jack Ketch’s. There is nothing humanising in their relation with their fellow-creatures. They go for the side that retains them.”

This year, which seems so much like one thrown away, was really memorable. Oliver Wendell Holmes, like so many men of genius, took some time to find the high road, but while he wandered somewhat aimlessly down side tracks, he acquired much that was useful to him afterwards. We can distinctly trace the lucid quality of the style of his medical essays to his readings in law books, and we can discern that this “ experimental year ” afforded the leisure which is necessary for vague poetic impulse to become a vital endowment. He wrote many poems which the College Magazine gladly received, and he wrote three ringing stanzas which made his name famous.

In the White Chamber of the old “ gambrel-roofed ” house, during a vacation of this year, his patriotism, his conservative instincts, and his poetic nature were stirred to intense feeling by reading the newspaper paragraphs which told of the proposed destruction of the “ Constitution ” of historic memory, and he wrote the impromptu verses called “ Old Ironsides,” with their fierce and almost challenging resonance :—

Ay, tear her tattered ensign down !
Long has it waved on high,
And many an eye has danced to see
That banner in the sky :
Beneath it rung the battle shout,
And burst the cannon's roar ;—
The meteor of the ocean air
Shall sweep the clouds no more !

Her deck, once red with heroes' blood,
Where knelt the vanquished foe,
When winds were hurrying o'er the flood,
And waves were white below,
No more shall feel the victor's tread,
Or know the conquered knee ;—
The harpies of the shore shall pluck
The eagle of the sea.

O better that her shattered hulk
Should sink beneath the wave ;
Her thunders shook the mighty deep,
And there should be her grave ;
Nail to the mast her holy flag,
Set every threadbare sail,
And give her to the God of storms,
The lightning and the gale !

The poem was sent to the *Daily Advertiser*, of Boston, and literally flew from paper to paper, and was read and recited and circulated everywhere. Public opinion grew so strong that the Secretary spared the old "Constitution," and the stanzas that had awakened indignation in the people made them aware of a new name in American literature.

But literature was not to absorb his attention yet, and in fact, for the next two or three years his interest in literature seems almost to have died, or to have been thrust aside as a stumbling-block in the midst of his path. He relinquished the study of the Law without regret, but he turned to Medicine with some misgiving.

“I never could tell,” he says, “why I left Law for Medicine,” but his year at the former profession apprised him of the fact that he had not even got upon the road, and any change was desirable that afforded the slightest possibility of his so doing.

He was twenty-one at this time, and soon found that in making the change he had obeyed an authentic intuition, and was able to devote himself with ardour to the pursuit of his studies. He writes to his friend Barnes to inform him of his altered plans,—“I must announce to you the startling position that I have been a medical student for more than six months, and am sitting with Wistar’s ‘Anatomy’ beneath my quiescent arm, with a stethoscope on my desk, and the blood-stained implements of my ungracious profession around me. I know I might have made an indifferent lawyer. I think I may make a tolerable physician. And so you must know that for the last several months I have been quietly occupying a room

in Boston, attending medical lectures, going to the Massachusetts Hospital, and slicing and slivering the carcasses of better men and women than I ever was myself, or am like to be."

He could write in this somewhat over-buoyant manner after he had been six months at his new work, but his first impressions were very depressing. Anæsthetics were not discovered in 1830, and the sights he witnessed in the operating theatre came as a shock to his sensitive nature, and produced a feeling of awe-stricken sympathy, as did the faces of the sick people in the long rows of beds at the Hospital. After the first paralysing sight of these things he found himself more inclined to "talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs," and to moralise upon mortality rather than study osteology. He always had the preacher's instinct, although he never mounted the pulpit.

Dr. Holmes was fortunate in his first professor, for under Dr. Jackson he entered into a fine conception of the doctor's province. This "wise and good man" reminds us of that fifteenth century surgeon who used to say, "I dressed him, and God cured him," for he considered the doctor's first and most important function was to take care of his patient, and gave this as his interpretation of the much-abused phrase, "curing a patient." "Nature heals and art helps by removing hindrances

if she can, and by putting none in the way if she cannot be more positively helpful."

Writing more than fifty years after, Dr. Holmes says, "I never said, 'I will cure ; or can cure ; or would, or could, or had cured any disease.' My venerated instructor, Dr. James Jackson, taught me never to use that expression."

CHAPTER II.

STUDENT DAYS IN EUROPE.

If I had my own way, I own I would never return until I could go home with the confidence of placing myself at once at the head of the younger part of the profession.

LETTERS OF O.W.H.

AFTER spending a few months, and attending two courses of lectures at Dr. Jackson's private school of medicine, arrangements were made for his travelling to Europe, and pursuing his studies in Paris under the famous men who were teaching there at that time.

His father's income was wholly inadequate to allow of his son's following this plan, but his mother fortunately came from a well-to-do family, and had money of her own, which made the project feasible, and in March, 1823, he set off for New York to join the *Philadelphia*, which was to take him to Europe.

While waiting at New York he fell in with a party of Bostonians, who made the journey

pleasant to him, despite the stormy weather and his sea-sickness. The passage took twenty-three days, and on April 26th he landed at Portsmouth.

The rough weather which his ship encountered prevented him crossing the Channel immediately, and he tells of how he took the opportunity afforded by this delay to visit Salisbury Cathedral; to hear a benediction from the lips of a Lord Bishop who received £18,000 a year; to make a pilgrimage "in a fly" to Stonehenge; and to pay a visit in company with some other Americans, who passed themselves off as Englishmen, to the dockyards at Portsmouth. But, calmer weather supervening, the danger of the Channel passage was no longer an excuse for holiday making, and Holmes, with other students, journeyed to Havre, and thence to Paris.

For several reasons we get no very interesting account of student life in Paris from Oliver Wendell Holmes. He lived chiefly with other students from his own country, who were studying there at the same time, and he speedily became absorbed in his profession, which saved him from the fascination of the life that is depicted in Murger's "Vie de Bohème."

His interest in his studies was perhaps a sufficient argument for work, but in Paris he first woke up to the fact that he was a man,

with his own way to make in the world, and he applied himself with ambition, and with much more vigour than he had shown at Harvard. From a letter to his brother we can judge that he had settled down to take life seriously, and was determined to use his opportunities. "When a body has got to your age he should give up all his idle fancies, and apply himself to some practical use—pleasantly, if he can; odiously, if he must. . . . But just put off the age of action a little too long, and there is a great chance that you evaporate into 'general knowledge.'" Wise advice, which he was putting into practice in his own case.

In Paris his attention was devoted almost wholly to his work. He rose early in the morning; attended at the Hospital of La Pitié for lecture and dissection at 7.30 a.m.; breakfast came somewhere between 10 a.m. and 11 a.m., and after breakfast he gave himself up to study either at the hospital or at home, until the evening.

The evenings were given up largely to dinner and recreation. There were other Bostonians studying at Paris, and, together with them, he took his dinner in some café, and soon learned to speak French, to eat French, and to drink French, and, probably, to criticise the English, for he says, in a letter home,

“The only really disagreeable people one meets are generally Englishmen,” and again, later on, when he went to London, “I have been at different hospitals, looking at different manifestations of English quackery,” but he happily had occasion in later life to change his opinions.

Besides these dinners, which were a real recreation to him, and of which he speaks with relish, he had other amusements. Occasionally he went to the theatre, and, more frequently, to hear the famous singers of the day, but the chief delight of his leisure hours was seemly loafing, and no doubt this occupation afforded him a better opportunity of really seeing and understanding the strangers among whom he was living, than the conventional means.

He watched for the priest, the horse, and the soldier, which tradition said were always to be seen on the Pont Neuf; he turned over the second-hand books that were offered for sale on the walls of the Quais; he ransacked the small dealers' shops, and hunted for old prints and, in fact, became something of a connoisseur in this line.

He visited, of course, the famous show places, and found himself in love most of all with the Louvre, but what he regretted later, and we regret to this day, is that he saw no occasion,

and made no opportunity to visit the famous people he might have done.

It is strange that he had no conception at this time of what a large place literature would demand in his life, and he himself tells us, that, had he known, he would have gone lion-hunting a little, and tried to see Thiers and Victor Hugo, Béranger and Georges Sand, Balzac and others. Perhaps it is better he did not, after all, for like so many other clever young men, he might have got swallowed up or mauled.

If he failed to go lion-hunting in the approved manner, he attended a very curious exhibition which is worth mentioning, because it seems so strange and remote to us to-day,—

“ I took a box one day at the Combats des Animaux, which takes place twice a week just in the outskirts of the city. A great number of bull-dogs fought with each other in succession, each pair fighting until one was killed or fairly beaten. Then a wolf was tied to a post and worried . . . and so on with other animals as victims, to make a sport and spectacle for a very unfeeling audience.” The letter which contains this account is cut short to catch the mail, so that we miss the author’s comment, but we cannot imagine that the entertainment was to his liking.

On the whole his time was chiefly absorbed in professional work, and we are chiefly inter-

ested in him as a student. The following extracts give a good idea of the keen way in which he set to work :—

“ It is true enough that I am avaricious of my time, because I want to learn more than — knows, and beat — out and out in the nice scientific touches. I am as usual all medicine ; getting up at seven and going to hospitals ; cutting up ; hearing lectures ; soaking, infiltrating in the springs of knowledge. There is a great deal more to be done than I was inclined to suppose, but the more the better, when one gets into good working trim. I suppose, of course you wonder in looking over my meagre letters not to find them full of Parisian talk, and gardens, and statues, and such like, but to tell the plain truth I see no more and hear no more of these things than you do,” and this extract from a letter to a friend who asks him to become a contributor to his paper is doubly interesting, as indicating how far back in his mind literature had been pushed by his other studies :—

A year and a half in the midst of circumstances which are very favourable to some faculties of the mind have weaned me from some of my old habits (literary) The nature of the studies I am pursuing, the singular advantages I am at present enjoying . . . have forced me to forbid myself any diversion from the path of my professional studies. . . . Nearly five hours in the day I pass at the bedside of patients, . . .

and I have always a hundred patients under my eye. . . . You may suppose then that if I can devote three or four hours every day to my books . . . the electricity for that day is pretty well drawn off. . . . No, John, a heavier burden from my own science if you will, but not another hair from the locks of Poesy, or it will be indeed an ass's back that is broken. I am not ashamed of the ambition of being distinguished in my profession, but more than that, I have become attached to the study of truth by habits formed in severe and sometimes painful self-denial.

In truth, Oliver Wendell Holmes fairly plunged into his work in Paris. Always acute and observant, and anxious to learn, he drank in knowledge from all who were able and willing to give it. There was Lisfranc, well known to English students, as his name is associated with the tubercle on the first rib, a fact which they are required to remember. Holmes followed him as he went the round of his patients, and watched him when he operated—a strange man who loved to bleed his patients and regretted the guardsmen of the Empire, “because they had such splendid thighs to amputate.”

He went round the Hotel des Invalides with ruddy-faced and white-aproned Larrey, Napoleon's favourite surgeon, and the most honest man he had ever known. “To go round the Hotel des Invalides with Larrey was to live again the campaigns of Napoleon,

to look on the sun of Austerlitz, to hear the cannons of Marengo, to shiver in the snows of the Russian retreat."

Then there was Velpeau, who seemed to him more capable of wielding the sledgehammer than handling the lancet. But, unchallenged among all the surgeons was Dupuytren, whose name carries us so far back when we remember he was one of the last to see a child touched for the King's Evil. "He marched through the wards of the Hotel Dieu like a lesser kind of deity . . . soft-spoken, undemonstrative."

Girt with his apron he went from bed to bed, followed by a crowd of students, among whom Oliver Wendell Holmes figured, and when he stopped before a bed and leaned over to examine a patient the students "piled" up on his back, to see and hear, and he would "shake them off like so many rats and mice."

Boyer, Ricord, Broussais,—he attended them all, except perhaps the last mentioned, who lectured to empty benches for the most part, and whose conclusion was interrupted by the door banging, and students crowding in to hear the eloquent Andral, who lectured immediately after him.

There were other famous surgeons and physicians in Paris at this time whom we need not mention, but we have still to refer to the

most notable one among them all,—one who influenced Dr. Holmes in a remarkable degree.

At Harvard, as was mentioned, class patriotism was the fashion, but in Paris among the students keen and often bitter partisanship was the order of the day. The students were at liberty to choose their own professors and lecturers, and to follow their own preference with regard to the surgeons they attended. They fell in love with their favourites as girls do with their Sunday School teachers, and supported them with the tongue and with heavier argument, so that Holmes was reminded of the Middle Ages, when each baron had his following ready to feud on his behalf. He speedily attached himself to the famous Louis, who was worshipped by the students of that day, and is not forgotten by those of our own time. He was regarded as the first teacher in Paris, and in addition to the rare gift of the instructor of youth, he was able to awaken the students, and to fire them with a generous ambition.

Dr. Holmes says of him, that he was of "serene and grave aspect," and again, "he was modest in the presence of nature, and fearless in the face of authority—unwavering in the pursuit of truth."

His fault was that his personality so dominated the students that they gave themselves

up entirely to his teaching, and were apt to regard sneeringly that of other men.

Dr. Holmes recognised this in later life, and admitted that sometimes he could have been better employed than in sitting at the feet of Louis, or following out on his own behalf the teaching he had received from him. Nevertheless, he was a great man, and a great teacher, and had a greater influence upon Dr. Holmes' professional life than any other.

At the close of his first year in Paris he writes an account of his stewardship to his parents before setting out for a tour in the Low Countries.

I have spent a year—within a few weeks—in Paris. In that time my expenses have been 7,000 francs—that is to say, about as much as those of my companions. I have lived comfortably, liberally if you please, but in the main not extravagantly. I have employed my time with a diligence that leaves no regrets. My aim has been to qualify myself, so far as my faculties would allow me, not for a mere scholar, for a follower of other men's opinions, for a dependent on their authority, but for the character of a man who has seen, and therefore knows: who has thought and therefore has arrived at his own conclusions. I have lived with a great and glorious people. I have thrown my thoughts into a new language. I have received the shock of new minds and new habits. . . . I hope you do not think your money wasted. For my own part I am perfectly certain that I might have lived until I was grey without

acquiring the experience I have gained, and hope still further to improve by changing the scene of my life and studies.

There is obviously a great difference between the character of this letter and that of his communications to Phineas Barnes when he was at Harvard. Oliver Wendell Holmes had developed immensely during his year in Paris, and although there is little at present that suggests the genial humour and rare sympathy of the "Autocrat," yet we recognise a serious mind at work, and one of an independent stamp.

After dispatching this satisfactory report of his year's progress he felt at liberty to enjoy the vacation, and set off, with some friends, for a trip down the Rhine, to be followed by a tour in the Low Countries. After this they crossed to England, where he found the tomb of an ancestor in Westminster Abbey, and paid twopence to the "banditti" who demanded this fee from those who would see over St. Paul's. There is humour and criticism in his letters from London as there often was in those he sent from Paris, but the humour is a little acrid, and we miss the charity which a little later would have left out many things, not from fear of what his parents might have thought of his opinions, but from a desire not to hurt their feelings.

He stayed some weeks in London, lamenting the "austere" Sunday which contrasted so strikingly with the Parisian celebration of that day. In fact his life in Paris worked with the influences at Harvard, and with Scott's Bible to make him not only unsympathetic with the Puritan Sabbath, but with Calvinistic orthodoxy, and it was not till years later that he was able to take up many things that he had thrown down in his youth, and make them his own in a new and touching way.

The chief value of his stay in London was the opportunity afforded him of visiting the London hospitals, of seeing the London surgeons operate, and learning something of the English practice and interpretations of medical and surgical science. His opinion of Englishmen and things English remained on the whole unimproved, as many of his letters suggest, and it was not until his second visit to Europe in 1886 that he was able to speak with real cordiality of the mother country.

His sketch of Edward Irving, who was famous at this time, and whom he heard preach, is worth giving, if only to show how far he had to travel before he could arrive at that equally effective and humorous, but much more charitable style by which we know him.

He is a black, savage, saturnine, long-haired Scotchman, with a most Tyburn-looking squint to him. He

said nothing remarkable that I remember. Mr. Irving and his flock have given up the unknown tongue, and confine themselves to rolling up their eyes so as to show the whites in a formidable manner.

This sketch of Irving is only interesting for the reason that has been given above, for it is not even a good caricature.

After a few weeks in London, learning, and admiring, and abusing, he made a trip to Scotland, thence back to the English Lakes, and homeward to Dover. During this part of his tour he couldn't resist the temptation to indulge in a ride in the train which had recently begun to run between Liverpool and Manchester, and which was an expensive way of travelling then, but the compensation of travelling thirty-two miles in an hour and a half was something to be taken into account, and the speed astonished Oliver Wendell Holmes :—

I arrived in Manchester intending to go straight to London, but the idea of the railway was so tempting that I ordered a hasty dinner, clapped my luggage and myself upon one of the steam carriages, and was in Liverpool in an hour and a half, having gone considerably more than twenty miles an hour, and not making a very short passage either, for they have been the whole distance (thirty-two to thirty-four miles) in an hour.

After this extravagance he continued his way by coach, assuring his people that he always rode outside, which was cheaper and more pleasant.

About the end of July, 1834, he returned to Paris by the Dover-Calais route, and paid a visit on his way to the Inn at Calais which Sterne has made memorable in his "Sentimental Journey." The letter containing his description of the environs of Paris is almost lyric in parts. He was delighted to get back, and his tour had served, among other things, to whet his appetite for work, and his love for the French capital. He looked forward to another year of work with all the advantages it meant. Louis had shown him great favour by allowing him the freedom of his wards. He had been elected to a Medical Society of Observation, that would bring him in touch with some of the most intelligent young Frenchmen. He had opportunities at Paris to learn operating as it could be learned nowhere else at that time, and with all this in view he received a letter from home that suggested a curtailment of his study and the Italian tour with which he hoped to round his course, on account of the purse at home growing lean, and perhaps because his parents were made anxious by the disturbed state of Paris at that time.

He pleaded his cause with energy. "As for abridging my stay in Paris, a few reasons will soon convince you in that matter," and he proceeds to give his parents an account of his advantages and opportunities which have

been enumerated above. A little later he wrote again in the same strain, and these letters show how wonderfully keen and absorbed he had become in his profession, almost to the point of making him selfish and careless of his parents' feelings, it would occasionally seem.

I say nothing about coming home. . . . If I had my own way, I own I would never return until I could go home with the confidence of placing myself at once at the head of the younger part of the profession.

And in another letter he writes :—

I have received no new letter from you since the one in which you spoke of my coming home sooner than I had expected. Since that letter one of the ideas that troubled your imagination—that of war—is removed. . . . And in the meantime I cannot give you an idea of the zeal and profit with which I have been applying myself to certain branches which I had hitherto neglected. Among other things I have turned my attention to operating, and in the course of a few weeks I have become an expert and rapid operator.

It is not certain that his letters convinced his parents, but at all events he completed his course, and fulfilled his desire for an Italian tour before returning to Boston to commence the practice of his profession. The time he spent in Paris, besides giving him the freedom of another language and the larger outlook which is almost always the result of being in a foreign land and among a strange people,

had made him as familiar with disease as a keeper of a menagerie is with the "wild beasts he feeds and handles." He was thoroughly equipped as a physician, not only because he had applied himself to study, but because he had had experience, as he writes:—

If I was asked, "Why do you prefer that intelligent young man to this venerable practitioner?" . . . I should say, "because the young man has experience." . . . True experience is the product of opportunity multiplied by years. . . . But merely to have breathed a concentrated scientific atmosphere like that of Paris must have an effect on any one who has lived where stupidity is tolerated. . . . I have more fully learned at least the principles since I have been in Paris,—not to take authority where I can have facts; not to guess when I can know; not to think a man must take physic because he is sick.

It was his study in Paris that taught him to hate half-truths and green knowledge, against which he carried on a crusade in later life, but it had also taught him to forget literature for the time being.

"I have entirely relinquished the business of writing for journals, and shall say 'No,' though Minerva and Plutus come hand in hand to tear me, the Cincinnatus of Science, from the plough-tail she has commanded me to follow."

He reminds himself of the author of "The Seasons," when he writes his letter home in

bed, and there is casual reference in his correspondence to Goldsmith, Coleridge, Sterne, —but nothing more. His mind, however, had absorbed many impressions that were to mature and be reproduced later on, but years were to pass before the fruits of his mind were ripe. In the meantime he sends his microscope (an unusual part of a practitioner's equipment in those days, and indicative of his thorough conception of his calling) and two skeletons home, and sets off for the conventional grand tour in Italy.

CHAPTER III.

DOCTOR AND PROFESSOR.

“ A man can see further, sir,” he said one day, “ from the top of Boston State House, and see more that is worth seeing, than from all the pyramids and turrets and steeples in all the places in the world! . . . Yes, sir, and there are great truths . . . that people are looking for from the tops of these hills of ours.”

—*The Professor.*

TOWARDS the end of 1835 Oliver Wendell Holmes left Europe for America, never to return until half a century had elapsed, when, in company with his daughter, he made the tour which he describes in “ A Hundred Days.” During this long interval he lived in Boston or Cambridge, scarcely stirring off his own hearthrug, as he says, and through his personality, his public-spirited interest in affairs, and above all, his literary work, he did more than anyone else to make Boston famous.

When he returned to Boston to commence practice in 1836—“ delighted to see my own country once again ”—he was a young man, twenty-seven years of age, of conservative

and aristocratic instincts, of buoyant spirit, and of keen and alert mind, "bubbling over with humour, and sparkling with coruscations of his own peculiar genius."

We have hardly a glimpse of the "Autocrat" during these years, as he himself had no vision, and no desire for literary fame. He had come from Europe with dreams of distinguishing himself in his profession, and he was well equipped by knowledge and experience to succeed in general practice, through but poorly seconded by his peculiarly sensitive temperament and hindered perhaps by that quality of mind which urged him to dip in many books rather than read through one.

If youth and high hopes are destiny enough, he would have had nothing to fear, but even these priceless assets are not all that one requires in order to build a large practice.

Dr. Holmes never did have a brilliant career as a general practitioner, and the story goes that once, when asked to divide his practice, he replied with regret that he was unable to entertain the idea, as he had only one patient.

There are many reasons that account for his moderate success as a physician. He never exerted himself "to make business," as he said, but what hindered him chiefly was that folk held to the opinion then, as they do now, that the man who made a joke as the

front door was opened to him, and laughed while climbing the stairs, could not possibly compose himself to a seemly gravity before entering the sick room, and was a very unlikely man to rightly appreciate the serious condition of his patient.

Aware as he was of this opinion, he could never hinder himself from seeing a joke, and even laughing heartily at it, and he preferred to check his income rather than his spirits, as frequent references in his writings indicate :—

It's a vastly pleasing prospect when you're screwing
out a laugh,
That your very next year's income is diminished by a
half.

This buoyancy, and the sin of writing poetry, no doubt hindered some folk, who liked him well enough as a man, from engaging his services as a physician, as possibly the greater genius of Oliver Goldsmith as wit and poet operated in a larger measure against his success in a similar direction, though it must be confessed poor Noll's qualifications were of the scantiest, and one would prefer a prescription written by any spectacled apothecary to one drafted by him.

It is most probable that the foregoing reasons had little enough to do with the fact that Dr. Holmes was not so popular at the bedside as we could wish to find him, and the real

reason was that the sick patient never was his subject, and he was marked out for that other branch of his profession in which he achieved distinction later on.

He certainly was a careful physician, and did his utmost for his patients, but he was not in love with general practice. He could never become indifferent to the painful scenes in the sick room, and valued such practice chiefly because he was compelled to keep a horse and chaise, which he drove to the immense risk of himself and his neighbour; and although he intimated that the slightest "fevers" were acceptable, he lost no time in making himself known in his profession as a writer, which no doubt helped him to those appointments which enabled him, eventually, to relinquish private practice.

In the year that he returned from Europe and established himself in practice, he obtained what professional prestige was attached to joining the Massachusetts Medical Society, and during this and the following year he won distinction in his profession by carrying off three prizes for medical essays. He writes:—

The Boylston Prize was almost unanimously awarded to my dissertation. It is somewhat pleasant to have cut out a fifty dollar prize under the guns of two old blazers who have each of them swamped their competitors in preceding trials.

These papers he included in a volume published under the title "Medical Essays" at a later period. Of these the essay on "Intermittent Fever in New England" was the valuable result of laborious work, and is still worth reading by those interested in the subject.

These essays need not be avoided by lay readers on account of the title of the book that contains them, as they are brimful of wit and make racy reading, and, if he happen to be incredulous of the value of "one-millionth-of-a-grain doses," the essay on Homœopathy may be recommended to him, as Dr. Homes hated this pseudo-science almost as well as he hated Calvinism.

In addition to fairly starting practice and writing his medical essays, between 1836-1838 he attended the Massachusetts General Hospital as one of the physicians until, in the latter year, he was appointed, to his great pleasure, Professor of Anatomy at Dartmouth College, which chair he retained until 1840.

These early years of practice were noticeable apart from his medical work. He had the honour of being asked to read a poem at the Phi Beta Kappa Society, and he delivered on that occasion a metrical essay, "which presents," as he says, "the simple and partial views of a young person trained after the school

of classical English verse, as represented by Pope, Goldsmith and Campbell, with whose lines his memory was well stocked."

The year 1836 is noticed with pleasure, as during that year he renewed his allegiance to literature,—which he had forsworn when he went to Europe,—by publishing his first volumes of poetry, which contained, among others, the metrical essay, "Old Ironsides," and "The Last Leaf," which will be discussed later on.

In 1837, his father, Abiel Holmes, died at the ripe age of seventy, and the loss of his father made him desirous of making a home for himself. At all events his mind soon turned in this direction, and we find him writing to his friend Barnes to this effect:—

And so you are married. I wish I were, too. I have flirted and written poetry long enough, and I feel I am growing domestic and tabby-ish, . . . and it is by no means impossible that another summer or so may see my name among the hymeneal victims. . . . I do indeed congratulate you on changing your isolated condition into the beatific state of duality. The very moment one feels that he is falling into the old age of youth—which I take to be from twenty-five to thirty, in most cases—he must not dally any longer.

Three years after his father's death, Dr. Holmes married Amelia Lee Jackson, the daughter of Judge Jackson, of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts.

This lady, who endeared herself to all who were privileged to know her, added to personal charm a mind and character of rare nobility, and brought Dr. Holmes every good he could desire except a fortune. She was his comrade as well as his wife, and being possessed of humour and a sensitive spirit, she was able to enter with imaginative sympathy into his dearest concerns.

In her anxiety and determination to shield him from that legion of time-stealers and temper-stealers who prey upon men of growing reputation, she made great personal sacrifices, but, as Mr. Morse says, with "such grace and cheerfulness that they might well pass unnoticed," and would have rejoiced the heart of Robert Louis Stevenson, who grieved that sacrifice was so often brutalising, and that men and women were so often able, from a shocking sense of duty, to cut off their members, and willing, after all, to lose their reward and wander gloomily through the world seeking the lost members.

Dr. Holmes had three children, the first—a boy—who bore his father's name, and distinguished himself in the Civil War, was the occasion of that delightful essay, "My Hunt after the Captain," in which Dr. Holmes tells of his anxious journey to the front to find his wounded son. This son studied Law

afterwards, and during his father's lifetime was appointed Associate Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court. His brother, who also entered the legal profession and was gifted in many ways, was dogged by ill-health all his life, and died prematurely in 1884.

The second child—a girl—lived to marry, and to accompany her father on his tour in Europe, but she, too, predeceased Dr. Holmes.

When Dr. Holmes married in 1840 he relinquished his Professorship at Dartmouth College, bought a house in Montgomery Place, Boston, and settled down to practice again with some persistency until 1847, when he was appointed to the Chair of Anatomy and Physiology at Harvard University.

During these seven years he made himself famous, locally, as a wit, a poet, a table-talker, and a rarely kindly man, as Lowell wrote in his "Fable for Critics":—

This Holmes, who is matchless among you for wit,

.

Full of fancy, fun, feeling, or spiced with satiric
In a measure so kindly, you doubt if the toes
That are trodden upon, are your own or your foes'.

But it must not be forgotten that Holmes was always eminently more than a witty man, and that, with our respect and great admiration for him as a man of letters, we are bound and glad to admit that his single con-

tribution to medical science is more worthy of remembrance than all his contributions to literature.

In 1843, he announced his discovery of the contagiousness of puerperal fever, and was confronted by the savage, and even abusive opposition of the leading obstetricians in the country.

His attitude during this controversy was remarkably fine, and is worthy of mention, because with dignity and persistence he maintained his position and made foes, which, to a man of his temperament—almost over-anxious not to quarrel, not to oppose—must have required a stern motive.

Motive enough he had, for he was pleading on "behalf of the women whose lives were at stake," and, although he won the victory, it was a hard fight against great odds.

Authority and custom, which "doth make dotards of us all," in the persons of the Professors of Philadelphia, foamed with indignation; and the medical students, "babes in knowledge," as Holmes calls them, "pumping away for the milk of truth at all that offers, were it nothing better than a Professor's shrivelled forefinger," followed their instructors.

But Dr. Holmes never lost his temper during this controversy, and when he republished his essay in 1855, he said, "I take no offence,

and make no retort. No man makes a quarrel with me over the counterpane that covers a mother with her new-born infant at her breast." And so, when his principle made its way, and was fully established, it was with all the more pleasure that he had won a great victory over prejudice in a great manner—that he could say he would be content to have lived, though nothing else had come of his life.

During these early years of practice he wrote many poems of differing merit. One was addressed to Charles Dickens, who visited America in 1842, and was welcomed at Boston. Another was read before the Phi Beta Kappa Society in the following year. In fact, at the request of friend or enemy, he was ready to write a poem and make it suitable for reading at a birth, death, or marriage.

In 1846, the year which seems to close a chapter of his life, he wrote a rhymed lesson to be read before the Boston Mercantile Association, and the following year, which opened another chapter, saw him seated with pride and pleasure in the Professor's chair at Harvard.

He was appointed, in 1847, Parkman Professor of Anatomy and Physiology in the Medical School of that University, but he applied himself and his students to so many subjects while he occupied this position that he humorously denominated the chair a "settee." His task

became so onerous on account of his willingness to perform more than was in the bond, that in 1871, a separate chair in Physiology was established and he remained Professor of Anatomy until his resignation in 1882. He lectured at Harvard University for many years, and obtained such distinction as a lecturer that a brief account of him at the time is desirable. David Macrae describes him as "A plain little dapper man, his short hair brushed down like a boy's, but turning gray now; a trifle of frizzy hair under his ears, a powerful jaw and a thick, strong underlip, that gives decision to his look, with a dash of pertness. In conversation he is animated and cordial,—sharp too, taking the words out of one's mouth." And Miss Mitford depicts him as "A small, compact little man; the delight and ornament of every society he enters; buzzing about like a bee, or fluttering like a humming-bird; exceedingly difficult to catch unless he be really wanted for some kind act, and then you are sure of him."

He lectured to a class of three hundred students in Anatomy, and was appointed to take the last lecture hour of the day, when the students were jaded and even nauseated by attendance at a series of previous lectures. This honour was conferred upon Holmes because he was thought to be the most likely man to

keep them awake, and he soon proved himself equal to that task.

At one o'clock the students poured into the lecture theatre from two doors somewhere near the ceiling, for the seats sloped up in tiers as they do in a play-house. The lecturer climbed a flight of steps that led from the street, and entered the room by another door—"a small gentle, smiling man," but out of breath, for asthma troubled him much at this time.

When he had recovered himself a little, and the somewhat turbulent greetings of his class had subsided, he hopped about hunting for diagrams, specimens, etc., to illustrate his lecture, and then "plunged into his subject," which lay before him in the shape of a body decorously covered, and dissected in that part which constituted the immediate subject of the lecture, so that the vessels, nerves and muscles were exposed to view.

He had many qualifications apart from his bright and piquant style to make him an ideal lecturer in Anatomy. He was accurate before all things, and what is absolutely important in dealing with this subject, unwearying in his attention to detail.

From Louis he had learned the value, or rather the necessity of reiteration, and from his own kindly nature he learned to forego the pleasure of addressing himself to the clever

men of his class, and to speak with the dull ones in his mind all the while.

He was always urgent with himself to teach his students a little that they might learn thoroughly, and was not anxious, as so many lecturers are, to tell them all he knew, much of which the majority of his class could not appreciate. He hated half-knowledge, with which, he said, the American atmosphere was vocal, and made every effort during his lectureship to make his students discontented with it. "There is a rare difference," he used to say, "between green knowledge and seasoned knowledge."

He loved his class, and his subject, but it is characteristic of him that, when asked what part of Anatomy he liked best, he replied, "The bones: they are cleanest," and it is also in keeping with our idea of the man who was too sensitive to like the work of a general practitioner, that he would run out of his lecture-room when a rabbit was to be chloroformed, begging his demonstrator not to let it squeak. He never would agree to vivisection, perhaps believing with Hyrth, as Mr Morse says, "that Nature will tell the truth all the better for not being put to the torture."

If Holmes loved his students, they were attached in a rare way to him, and after his last lecture to them in 1882, amid deafening

applause, he was presented with a loving-cup bearing the words, "Love bless thee; Joy crown thee; God speed thy career," which so moved him that, as he said, "My tongue forgot its office, though my heart was in the right place."

During his lectureship in Anatomy he was appointed Dean of the Medical School. He occupied this position for several years, and the Massachusetts Medical Society did him the honour of electing him Anniversary Chairman in 1852, and Orator in 1860.

A very interesting controversy arose during his professorship, and one which has recently occupied the attention of our own Medical Faculty, viz., the question of the admittance of women to the profession. Addressing himself to the "English Annex" over the tea-cups years later, Dr. Holmes says, "Lecture to students of your sex? Why not, I should like to know? I don't think it is the calling for which the average woman is especially adapted, but my teacher got a part of his education from a lady, Madame Lachapelle, and I don't see why if one can learn from a woman, he may not teach a woman, if he knows enough."

But, though he himself had attended the lectures of Madame Lachapelle in Paris, he registered his vote against the women, but he did so, not because he had any fear as to what

would happen to the medical profession if they were admitted, but because he felt that something might happen to the women.

He never was a controversialist, and took no strong partisan attitude in this contention, but some time after the dispute had died down, he said :—

If here and there one intrepid woman insists on taking by storm the fortress of medical education, I would have the gates flung open to her, as if it were that of the citadel of Orleans, and she were Joan of Arc returning from the field of victory.

This attitude of mind, which does credit to his kindly nature, does nothing towards solving the problem; the gates must obviously be opened to all or none. Dr. Holmes never seems to have made up his mind on the subject. He thought that women on the whole should stick to nursing, and feared that a good nurse would only become a poor doctor if admitted to the medical profession. On the other hand, he says :—

I am for giving every chance for a good education, and if they think Medicine is one of their proper callings, let them try it.

But he goes on to suggest that they should specialise, and should always have an expert of the other sex at their back—an opinion which would receive swift condemnation to-day at the hands of women. Perhaps he was afraid

they would become herbalists, or worse still, homœopathists, for, he said, "they are so imaginative and impressible that they are at the mercy of all sorts of fancy systems."

One is bound to confess that Dr. Holmes contributed nothing to this question. His real opinion, if he had one, was that women should not be admitted, but his kindly and generous nature inclined him to the other side, lest he should hurt the feelings of women, and seem to stand in their light. His attitude, however, gives us an insight into his character, and shows us temperamental characteristics which were strength and weakness to him.

When Dr. Holmes resigned his Anatomy Class in 1882, he was at once appointed Emeritus Professor at Harvard University, and in leaving the consideration of him as a Professor of Medical Science, we quote Dr. Osler's words:—"He will always occupy a unique position in the affections of medical men, . . . as the most successful combination which the world has ever seen of the physician and the man of letters."

Between 1847 and 1882 many subjects besides Anatomy occupied Dr. Holmes' mind. His family was born during these years, and he moved his residence first to Charles Street, and then to a splendid house in Beacon Street, where he lived till the end of his life. He

spent the summer months of seven years from 1847 in Pittsfield, having built a house on a small estate that his great-grandfather had acquired a century earlier. All his recollections seem to cling and linger about these seven summers, which stood in his memory like the "seven golden candlesticks in the beatific vision of the holy dreamer." Even thirty years after, he wrote to a friend saying he was still loyal to the place.

He was intensely fond of the country, and approached as near to being annoyed as was possible with him if it was suggested that he was a town man. Pride in his own "Place" at Pittsfield, and his good fortune in having many notable men for near neighbours, among whom were Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, made it a very hard task to leave it.

The expense of a country house was more than he could afford, however. The architect, following the rule of his profession, erected a house to cost twice as much as he had agreed upon. Then a barn was wanted, and a horse and cart, and perhaps Dr. Holmes' management was not economical. However that may be, he felt compelled to sell it. With what regret he did so the following extracts from letters show. Writing years afterwards to J. Sargent, he says :—

I have never regretted my seven summers passed in Pittsfield, and never had the courage, although often asked, to visit the place since I left it. I have one particularly pleasant remembrance about my place—that I, in a certain sense, created it. The trees about are all or almost all of my planting. . . . Look at them as you pass my old place, and see how much better I have deserved the gratitude of posterity than the imbecile who only accomplished an extra blade of grass.

And to an old friend he writes :—

I can hardly believe it is almost thirty years since I bade good-bye to the old place, expecting to return the next season. We passed through the gate—under the maple which used to stand there ; took a look at the house and the great pine that stood, and I hope stands in its solitary beauty and grandeur—rode on—passed the two bridges,—reached the station—and Good-bye, dear old town ! Well, that is the way.

In 1852, Holmes joined that large body of notable men who were touring the country and lecturing in the interests of their pockets, and—we hope—of truth.

It is very remarkable that at that time the ablest men in literature and science—many of them men of genius as Emerson, Lowell, Thackeray—devoted a great deal of their time to lecturing, and what is perhaps more noticeable is that they were never in straits to find an audience to listen to them. The lecturer finds a very different condition of things prevailing to-day, partly because the

best men of the day do not lecture as was the case in Holmes' day, and partly because that spirit which existed in the middle of last century in America, and approved of anything of an educational character, however dull it might be, no longer predominates.

Oliver Wendell Holmes had no liking for this kind of work from the first, but his audiences had, and he never wanted for invitations, but his opinion of the "remarkably intelligent audience" did not improve as he became more acquainted with it, as the sketch in the "Autocrat" indicates:—

Front seats, a few old folks—shiny-headed—slant up best ear towards the lecturer—drop off asleep after a while when the air begins to get a little narcotic with carbonic acid. Bright women's faces—young and middle-aged . . . (pick out the best and lecture mainly to that). . . . Dull faces, here, there,—in how many places! I don't say dull people, but faces without a ray of sympathy or a movement of expression. They are what kill the lecturer. These negative faces with their vacuous eyes and stony lineaments pump and suck the warm soul out of him. That is why lecturers grow so pale.

And, in fact, if Holmes had been blessed with the most appreciative audience, no amount of good treatment they could have offered would have compensated a man with such a homing instinct as he had, for the misery of being away from his friends and fireside.

But the audience that gathered in a country town to be operated upon offered as little attraction to a man of Holmes' quick temperament as did the inconvenience of the necessary journey and the frequent discomfort of supper and bed at any inn but his own.

Lowell paid his biting tribute to the misery of lecturing in the country, and spoke of being received by a solemn committee in a room with a stove that smoked and having three cold fish tails laid in his hand to shake; then to the "cold lecture-room to read a cold lecture to a cold audience," and back again "to your smoke side, and the three fish-tails again," and almost everyone who had any experience of lecturing in the country at this time confirms in his own way this opinion.

But lecturing in Boston was a much more congenial task, and Dr. Holmes delivered his most important course on "The English Poets" to a large and cultured audience in that town.

Altogether his lecturing experience was valuable to him, apart from the fact that it enabled him to write that delightful chapter in the "Autocrat," for it did something towards preparing an audience for that book which began to appear in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1857.

The year 1857 is altogether memorable in Holmes' life and in the literature of America. Until that date, Oliver Wendell Holmes was

known chiefly as a medical man, with a local reputation and name, as a poet and author. He was outside "the charmed circle drawn around the scholars and poets of Cambridge and Concord," and felt some surprise when Lowell, who had been invited to edit a new monthly which Messrs. Philips, Sampson & Co. proposed to start, made the one condition of his acceptance that Holmes should be the first contributor to be engaged.

Lowell's insistence upon this condition did not depend upon his friendship for Holmes. His insight made him aware of Dr. Holmes' genius, and it is due to him that his friend was roused from his "literary lethargy," and called to active service.

From this time he became less and less a medical man, and more and more a man of letters, and the immediate recognition which the "Autocrat" won, besides startling the author into a better appreciation of his own powers, was sufficient stimulus to determine the direction of his whole subsequent career.

CHAPTER IV.

THE AUTOCRAT.

No sense is here of loss or lack ;
Before his sweetness and his light
The dial holds its shadows back,
The charmèd hours delay their flight.

His still the keen analysis
Of men and moods, electric wit,
Free play of mirth, and tenderness
To heal the slightest wound from it.

Whittier : " Our Autocrat."

IN his letters to his friend Dr. Holmes often complained of, or rather regretted, the necessities that compelled him to live for so many years in one town, and among one set of people. He had ambition above a provincial career, and felt that the kind of life he was living tended to make him "intensely local, and doubtless narrow in many ways," and yet the success of the "Autocrat" depended to a large extent upon its "intensely local" and consequently pungent flavour.

It was also because Oliver Wendell Holmes knew his town and fellow-townsmen so well,

and was addressing himself to all the breakfast-tables in Boston that he was able to speak with such directness, such ease and such fearlessness.

There is no need to speak now of the wit of the "Autocrat," but there is still occasion to remind the reader of its wisdom, and of the fact that the book was not written for the sake of displaying the author's gift of humour,—it is in the very best sense an autobiography in which the author goes back upon every phase of his life, not for the pleasure of reminiscence, but for the sake of garnering his experience for himself and for his readers, and from its pages the reader can gather more than a handful of sayings which constitute the Golden Book of Oliver Wendell Holmes on the conduct of life.

It has been Dr. Holmes' misfortune, both as a poet and prose-writer, to be compared to many men by virtue of a very superficial resemblance of his work to theirs. He was a "miscellaneous" writer, as was Sterne, but there is nothing in the individuality of their works to afford a comparison, and Goldsmith in the "Bee" adopted a familiar vein, as did Dr. Holmes, but the comparison cannot be carried legitimately any further.

Sir Thomas Browne, Lamb, Fuller, Sydney Smith are the names of a few only of the many

who have been called to stand beside Oliver Wendell Holmes, for the sake of comparing their height and size and features with his. But though these writers had humour, and often wrote in a manner that brings them very close to us while we are reading, there is not one of them who comes so close as does the "Autocrat." He is beside us all the while; we see his face pucker in anticipation of a humorous sentence he means to bring out, or grow grave as he offers us some truth that has cost him dearly to learn; or wistful as his imagination haunts the past, and he talks on in the vein of tender reminiscence forgetful of our presence for the moment. Then he endears himself to us because he is never condescending. We can tell he is anxious to see that what he says has the effect he intended; he wants us to mingle our laughter with his; he wants us to appreciate with sense and gratitude what he offers us as the ripest gleanings of his experience, and he is able to forget the superficial distinctions that separate men, and to actually feel that the deep and elemental principles of our nature are common to all men.

So he wrote always with the feeling that what had pleased him would please another, and what he had found of value in his adventures through life would be helpful to another, as he

himself said,—“ It is because you are just like me that I talk, and know that you will listen.”

The chief characteristic of his first and most notable prose work is its discursiveness. The writer wanders almost casually, as it appears sometimes, from subject to subject, but now he lingers to play over some whimsical or even serious idea with a kind of summer-lightning humour, and now he sheds a twilight and haunting beauty, or again he rains sharp, burning flashes upon some of our own ideas to show us of what stubble they are made, or fetches a beam that penetrates the opaque covering that custom and convention have wrapped around a subject, and shows us the heart of truth that these best allies of our life have somehow or other obscured or hidden; perhaps from their over-anxiety to preserve alive.

The conversational style of the “ Autocrat,” which seems so casual, and perhaps easy to imitate until one attempts it—was not chosen at hazard, but was the deliberate application of the rule he proposed to himself in ordinary conversation :—

“ Talk about those subjects you have had long in your mind, and listen to what others say about subjects you have studied but recently. Knowledge and timber should not be much used till they are seasoned.”

This is what accounts for the freshness and the apparent ease and spontaneity of the book, not that he offered his readers whatever came into his mind at the moment, and offered it for what it happened to be worth, but that he gave them the result of long pondering over men and ideas and books, and gave what he had found to be of worth to himself.

The same may be said of the "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table" as Coventry Patmore remarked of his small volume of "Sayings," when asked how long it had taken him to write it, viz., that it had taken him all the years of his life up to the time of his actually penning the book.

Dr. Holmes himself anticipates the criticism that the style and discursive nature of the book suggests when he says, "Do not think because I talk to you of many subjects briefly that I should not find it much lazier work to take each one of them and dilute it down to an essay," and a few quotations are sufficient to prove that the work does not consist of the remarks of a clever man upon every conceivable subject that offers, but are the mature work of a mind that has ripened slowly:—

Any new formula which suddenly emerges in our consciousness has its roots in long trains of thought, it is virtually old when it first makes its appearance among the recognised growths of intellect . . . A

The age at which he wrote the "Autocrat" was the age at which most men are "startled" by having themselves seriously called "old for the first time," it was the age at which men go back over the way they have come, surprised to find how dim and remote some phases of their life have become; it is also the time when they begin to compute the years, to weigh up what life has brought them or what is the residuum of their living, and what it is still likely to have in store—and we find the "Autocrat" doing all these things.

We could have judged of the time of life of the author of the "Autocrat" if we had not known who wrote it. No man could have penned that chapter on old age but one who was aware that he was traversing that decade of years which separates, like a neutral territory, maturity and old age, and who was looking round to see whether perchance he might renew his youth, or whether wisdom called him to readjust his life in view of the change that the years had brought and must bring. There is a large tolerance and charity, too, which warmly tempers the writer's view of men and things, and is too mellow to belong to youth.

His description of the coming of old age is well worth quoting here, if only as a specimen of his best prose style:—

Like all Nature's processes, it is gentle and gradual in its approaches, strewn with illusions, and all its little griefs are soothed by natural sedatives. But the iron hand is not less irresistible because it wears the velvet glove. The button-wood throws off its bark in large flakes, which one may find lying at its foot, pushed out, and at last pushed off, by that tranquil movement from beneath, which is too slow to be seen, but too powerful to be arrested. One finds them always, but one rarely sees them fall. So it is our youth drops from us,—scales off, sapless and lifeless, and lays bare the tender and immature fresh growth of old age. . . . Nature gets us out of youth into manhood, as sailors are hurried on board of vessels,—in a state of intoxication. We are hustled into maturity reeling with our passions and imaginations, and we have drifted far from port before we awake out of our illusions. But to carry us out of maturity into old age, without one knowing where we are going, she drugs us with strong opiates, and so we struggle along with wide open eyes that see nothing until snow enough has fallen on our heads to rouse our comatose brains out of their stupid trances.

Very little has ever been said of Oliver Wendell Holmes' style, and yet in passages like this it is gently rhythmic and beautiful, and often when he is looking away and writing, his prose has a warm, tender glow about it, as of autumn and evening.

He turned to his childhood and youth, to his life in Paris, and his experience as a doctor and lecturer for his illustrations and anecdote and reminiscence, and his contact

with life under so many disguises which his calling compelled him to, and his view of life from so many aspects which his impressible mind and his opportunity allowed, give to the philosophy of life which he expounds in the "Autocrat," a rounded and sometimes a final stamp.

His message, if we may use the term in reference to Oliver Wendell Holmes' teaching, had little to do with dogmas as we usually understand them, although he was often enough dogmatic. He preached no creed, and advanced no special theory, but with an optimism more wise, though less extravagant than Browning's, he taught that life is a noble calling, and that a man's adventure through time might be, and ought to be, a glad one as well as a useful one.

He taught the common virtues in an uncommon way. He told his readers what was known to them, but in such a way as to make them start as at the meeting of an almost forgotten acquaintance.

He often thrust his staff of truth under some old lie that had been allowed to rest too long undisturbed in the general mind, and turned it over, exposing to daylight the ugly and venomous things that habited beneath it, and he sometimes set his staff of sincerity against a stone that some worshipped as a truth,

and were willing to defend as such, but he did not mind being criticised.

“I wonder,” he says, “if anybody ever finds fault with anything I say at this table when it is repeated? I hope they do, I am sure. I should be very certain that I had said nothing of much significance if they did not.”

But if he spoke with utmost sincerity upon all occasions, whatever the consequence, and whether doing so to-morrow meant he must deny what he had taught the day before, he was never harsh or contemptuous of men, even in speaking of qualities in them that he hated.

He hated meanness,—“the only impiety,” as Epictetus says—and untruthfulness—the handle to all sin’s weapons, as he calls it—and in the “Autocrat” frequently by implication begs his hearers to hate these vices and love the corresponding virtues, but he teaches a wonderful charity toward those whose spiritual nature is halt or lame or bitter ugly.

“It is such a sad thing to be born a sneaking fellow, so much worse than to inherit a hump-back or a couple of club feet, that I sometimes feel as if we ought to love the crippled souls—if I may use this expression—with a certain tenderness which we need not waste on noble natures.”

There is much in this book to make us lean towards tolerance, but no suggestion of lowering

the moral standard of living, and if sometimes for a moment we feel that the author is speaking in a dangerously gentle manner, we are soon made to understand that he is dexterous in the use of the whip, and can administer sharp, wholesome rebuke, as well as cover with his charity a multitude of sins.

His teaching is vigorous and tonic, and the book indicates a wonderful independence of mind, and inculcates that upon his hearers. He hated ready-made opinions, and would not have them himself at any price; and if he was ever contemptuous, which one doubts, it was with respect to those who never bestir themselves to discover a truth on their own behalf.

He says :—

Many a man
Owes to his country his religion,
And in another would as strongly grow
Had but his nurse and mother taught him so.

And it was not only with respect to those who never discover their religion for themselves that he spoke in this half-contemptuous manner but with respect to any who were willing to take unchallenged an opinion from another.

We have spoken chiefly of the "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table," as a book of experience, because it owed so much to the author's reading of life, and so little, comparatively, to culture.

Oliver Wendell Holmes was, of course, a very cultured man, and widely read, or he could never have uttered himself so poignantly upon so many subjects, but there is nothing bookish about his table-talk, and he drew very slightly upon his book-knowledge for it; yet there is evidence not only that he had read books, but that he had studied the art of writing books.

It is very seldom, if ever, noticed that the "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table" owes a great deal to art, even with respect to its form. It is not brilliant table-talk after all, and though there is no story running through the papers that compose the book, yet when we turn the last leaf we have made acquaintance with several personalities in addition to that of the chief speaker, and it is a very curious fact that we have arrived at our knowledge of the other boarders at the table, not altogether or even chiefly by their contributions to the conversation, but by the different ways in which the "Autocrat" speaks to them, or passes them over, when they venture upon a remark.

Before speaking of the many qualities of humour which characterise this book, and which there is little occasion to mention at all, two passages may be quoted,—the first to show how entirely original was the use he made of illustrations that are generally con-

sidered hackneyed, and the second to indicate how poignant his style and thought frequently are :—

Nothing strikes one more in the race of life than to see how many give out in the first half of the course.

* * * * *

Ten years gone. First turn in the race. A few broken down. Two or three bolted. Several show in advance of the ruck. *Cassock*, a black colt, seems to be ahead of the rest ; those black colts commonly get the start, I have noticed, of the others, in the first quarter. *Meteor* has pulled up.

Twenty years. Second corner turned. *Cassock* has dropped from the front, and *Judex*, an iron-gray, has the lead. But look ! how they have thinned out ! Down flat,—five,—six,—how many ? They lie still enough ! they will not get up again in this race, be very sure ! And the rest of them, what a “ tailing off ” ! Anybody can see who is going to win,—perhaps.

Thirty years. Third corner turned. *Dives*, bright sorrel, ridden by the fellow in the yellow jacket, begins to make play fast ; is getting to be the favourite with many. But who is that other one that has been lengthening his stride from the first, and now shows close up to the front ? Don't you remember the quiet brown colt *Asteroid*, with the star in his forehead ? . . .

Forty years. More dropping off,—but places much as before.

Fifty years. Race over. All that are on the course are coming in at a walk ; no more running. Who is ahead ? Ahead ? What ! and the winning-post a slab of white or gray stone standing out from that turf where there is no more jockeying or straining for victory ! Well, the world marks their places in its betting-book ;

but be sure that these matter very little, if they have run as well as they knew how !

And this other quotation where he also makes use of a common illustration but which is quoted for its poignant style :—

Tic ! Tac ! go the wheels of thought—our will cannot stop them ; they cannot stop themselves ; sleep cannot still them ; madness only makes them go faster

If we could only get at them as we lie on our pillows, count the dead beats of thought after thought, and image after image jarring through the over-tired organs ! Will nobody block those wheels ? uncouple that pinion ? cut the string that holds these weights ? blow up the infernal machine with gunpowder ? What a passion comes over us sometimes for silence and rest !

The infinite variety of the humour of the " Autocrat," ranging from broadest burlesque to the most subtle shades, has not been spoken of because it is too obvious to call for much remark and has so often been insisted upon to the obscuring of other equally important aspects of Oliver Wendell Holmes' genius.

He himself was well aware of the detriment his reputation was likely to suffer from folk regarding him solely as a humorist and reading his books for their wit and drollery, forgetting all the while the deep significance of much that he was writing.

" I like to make you laugh well enough," he says, " when I can, but then observe this : if the sense of the ridiculous is one side of an impressible nature, it is very well ; but

if that is all there is in a man, he had better have been an ape at once, and so have stood at the head of his profession."

A little later he remarks :—

It is a very dangerous thing for a literary man to indulge his love for the ridiculous. People laugh with him just as long as he amuses them ; but if he attempts to be serious, they must still have their laugh, and so they laugh at him " ;

and there is no doubt he was not always pleased to find himself perpetually teased by friend and acquaintance for something entertaining, and to see that their impatience for the opening pun led them to neglect what he considered the most important part of his work.

George Augustus Sala insists upon his being essentially a " funny man," and surely mistakes, somewhat, the quality of his humour when he says, " He does not make you sigh even while you laugh : you laugh at him just as you would at a droll face or a comic picture." But this is not the whole truth ; in fact, it is hardly the truth at all. His humour has many qualities ; sometimes it is nothing more than good-natured pun ; sometimes it is bold, or even audacious, but when we speak of him as a humorist we must not forget that there have been no great humorists who have not been artists at the same time. Humour without art is likely to furnish but a vulgar and farcical entertainment.

Oliver Wendell Holmes was an artist ; his humour is a subtle and delicate instrument which he could use not only to entertain his friends, but to punish his enemies if he would. When he tinges his humour with a not unkindly satire, we find him at his best, and the following quotation shows him in a vein of sly humour in which he excelled :—

If you ever saw a crow with a king-bird after him, you will get an image of a dull speaker and a lively listener. . . .

I found these remarks were received rather coolly. . . . So I went to my good old minister and repeated the remarks as nearly as I could remember them to him. He laughed good-naturedly, and said there was considerable truth in them. He thought he could tell when people's minds were wandering by their looks. In the early years of his ministry he had sometimes noticed this when he was preaching—very little of late years. Sometimes when his colleague was preaching he observed this kind of inattention.

This quotation is evidently from the work of an artist, and not of one who was simply a "funny man," who makes one laugh on account of his genial comicality. It is really extraordinary to remark what a master he was in the art of using his humorous gifts. He makes us laugh often, it is true, with no other purpose in view than to do so. He uses his gift to win our love for some characters we are too apt to pass over with contempt,

or our recognition of some truth the most of us fail to see ; but at other times he makes Error stand and confess with shame by showering him with ridicule ; or he uses his humour as the boys use a pliant stick, and with one swish cuts off some thistle head of arrogance, or ignorance, or imposture.

It is not to be imagined that a book like the " Autocrat of the Breakfast Table " escaped criticism. It was an entirely new development in American literature, and there were a number who were ready to cavil at it. Some disliked the incoherence of the work, some the humour, some the opinions of the " Autocrat," but an answer to nearly all its critics may be found in the book itself. There was a reason for his commencing the fourth paper with a humorous account of his correspondence relative to the Breakfast Table talks :—

No. 1 wants serious and earnest thought.

No. 2 (letter smells of bad cigars) must have more jokes ; wants me to tell a " good storey " which he has copied out for me. (I suppose two letters before the word " good " refer to some Doctor of Divinity who told the story).

No. 3 (in female hand), more poetry.

No. 4 wants something that would be of use to a practical man.

No. 5 (gilt-edged, sweet-scented)—" more sentiment," " heart's outpourings."

As various as these and more numerous were the requirements of some who published their criticism of the first papers, but there is no doubt they were silenced before the series concluded, either by the general appreciation which the book received, or the swift thrusts it gave. The following sentence must have been more than satisfaction to some critics. Speaking of the logical mind, Dr. Holmes says :—

I should say its most frequent work was to build a pons asinorum over chasms that shrewd people can bestride without such a structure.

The way he told the story of Sydney Smith probably reached some others, but he never replied to his critics except in this impersonal way, and, although he disliked their calling he was even kindly toward them and had a very tender regard for the poor little “paste-board” reputation of some of them.

This book, dipped from the running stream of his thought, as Dr. Holmes says of it, is, perhaps, his best title to fame and our best portrait of the author. He speaks to us freely, telling us his opinions of men and things, his whims, his likes and dislikes, and even his loves and hatreds, and when we turn the last page with regret, we put the book upon a shelf that contains a very few volumes which are honoured not for their wit or wisdom alone, but because

they have aroused in us a deep and intimate affection for their author.

The pages of the "Autocrat" were sprinkled with poems which was an offence to some, but which enhanced the charm of the book to the majority of its readers. Dr. Holmes had, previous to the year 1857, collected his occasional poems into a volume once or twice, and had gained a considerable reputation locally as a poet, but the poems in the "Autocrat," which are among his best, enlarged and established his name as a poet, and it may be as well to consider him under this aspect now.

CHAPTER V.

THE POET.

At first we thought him but a jest,
A ray of laughter, quick to fade ;
We did not dream how richly blest
In his pure life our lives were made ;
Till soon the aureole shone, confest,
Upon his crest.

—WILLIAM WINTER.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES commenced verse-making before he could write, and he continued to do so through the whole of an exceptionally long life. At an age that few men attain, and at which fewer still can hold a pen, he was writing his last poem to his classmates of 1829.

During these years he wrote humorous, pathetic, satiric, epigrammatic, ballad, and, in fact, every form of verse. He excelled in the "light patrician art" of *vers de société* and has given inspiration perhaps to Austin Dobson and others of our own day. But his title to our long remembrance depends upon a few short poems, and his poetical work quite

naturally suggests that invidious distinction between poetry and humorous and other kinds of verse.

Every critic has sent an arrow at "winged poesy," in the fond hope of bringing the bird to ground for close inspection, but they have only succeeded in driving her among the clouds, and in fact, her glory depends upon the upper air and the height she keeps, and could we take her at will, we should be no less disappointed than when we first discover that the gleaming pebble in the stream is no other than a dull and colourless stone when we cast it upon the high road.

The many definitions of poetry which have been attempted, even those of Hazlitt and Coleridge, are the worst of all definitions, and the sure test of poetry is not that it conforms to certain dogmata, but that it has its due effect upon the reader. The effect of great poetry is to suggest more than it tells, to make us feel that there is poetry in the air, and to make us aware of a haunting sense of kinship with a region of nobler thought and finer feeling than that in which we habitually move.

Only occasionally did Dr. Holmes write poetry that will fulfil this test. He deserves to be known as a poet, for he had the highest conception of the poet's office—to write down what he must; to be at the will of his inspiration

—but his poems are seldom inevitable, and it is a curious fact that the few that are of a very high order and urge us to use the word “inspiration” to account for them, are written in a style and metre that was not habitual to Oliver Wendell Holmes, and is not characteristic of him as a poet.

Mr. Stead, who has made some shrewd “guesses at truth,” remarks that Holmes was at his best in “The Chambered Nautilus” and “The Two Armies.” There seems no reason for particularising the latter, and still less for the strange conjunction of the two, but with regard to the remark that Oliver Wendell Holmes was at his best in the former, meaning that the poem typified him, although wishing it were the fact one must dissent from the criticism.

In this poem, and “Musa,” and here and there in other verses taken from his work, Oliver Wendell Holmes was beside himself. His muse had her way with him, and found little hindrance, though some may find the presence of the last few lines in the “Nautilus” an artistic flaw, saving the poem from perfection, and may wish that the wind of inspiration instead of fluttering the preacher’s gown, which he so often donned, had swept it clean away. Such fastidious artists, however, must be very few.

THE CHAMBERED NAUTILUS.

This is the ship of pearl, which, poets feign,
 Sails the unshadowed main,—
 The venturous bark that flings
 On the sweet summer wind its purpled wings
 In gulfs enchanted, where the siren sings,
 And coral reefs lie bare,
 Where the cold sea-maids rise to sun their streaming
 hair.

Its webs of living gauze no more unfurl;
 Wrecked is the ship of pearl!
 And every chambered cell,
 Where its dim streaming life was wont to dwell,
 As the frail tenant shaped his growing shell,
 Before thee lies revealed,—
 Its irised ceiling rent, its sunless crypt unsealed!

Year after year beheld the silent toil
 That spread his lustrous coil;
 Still, as the spiral grew,
 He left the past year's dwelling for the new,
 Stole with soft step its shining archway through,
 Built up its idle door,
 Stretched in his last-found home, and knew the old
 no more.

* * * *

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
 As the swift seasons roll!
 Leave thy low-vaulted past!
 Let each new temple, nobler than the last
 Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
 Till thou at length are free,
 Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea.

This poem, and "Musa,"—from which a quotation is given below—are reminiscent of the seventeenth century, whereas Oliver Wendell Holmes was a survival of the eighteenth. In fact, he was the last of that century's poets,—at home with the straight-backed measure of Pope,—and it is curious to notice that, while his poetry is as a rule so remote from that of our modern poets, in these two poems he comes quite close to them, and we recognise some of the same qualities that characterise the work of Francis Thompson and others.

O my lost Beauty!—hast thou folded quite
 Thy wings of morning light
 Beyond those iron gates,
 Where Life crowds hurrying to the haggard Fates,
 And Age upon his mound of ashes waits
 To chill our fiery dreams,
 Hot from the heart of youth plunged in his icy
 streams ?

Leave me not fading in these wings of care,
 Those flowers are silvered hair!—
 Have I not loved thee long,
 Though my young lips have often done thee wrong
 And vexed thy heaven-tuned ear with careless song ?
 Ah, wilt thou yet return,
 Bearing thy rose-hued torch, and bid thine altar
 burn ?

* * * *

Thou shalt be decked with jewels, like a queen,
 Sought in those bowers of green

Where loop the clustered vines
 And the close-clinging dulcamara twines,—
 Pure pearls of Maydew where the moonlight shines,
 And summer's fruited gems,
 And coral pendants shorn from Autumn's berried
 stems.

—From *Musa*.

The extracts here given are from his best work, but not from his most popular poems. "Enoch Arden" is better known than "Ænone," and the "Pied Piper" than "A Death in the Desert," and from among Dr. Holmes' poems "The Last Leaf" has won a larger tribute of praise than "The Chambered Nautilus." His biographer implies that this popularity should give it precedence in our estimate of his poems, and treats with a shade of impatience those who judge of poetry by other than the popular standard.

The simple and touching beauty of "The Last Leaf" is sufficient to account for its large appeal, but we must remember that it also commends itself to those who read little poetry, because it requires no concentration, and the fool may run as he reads; whereas a poem of high imaginative quality makes a large demand upon the reader, both of intellect and imagination, because even the great poets have so often light enough by which to see clearly for themselves, but so rarely light and heat sufficient

to transfigure wholly the vision for their readers, and only for the briefest moments have the greatest poets been so wrought upon themselves as to be able to transmute their vision into a new and near reality for their readers. When this has been the case, art has wholly triumphed, and we easily enter into the poet's labour, and reap where we have not strawed.

Although "The Last Leaf" is not—save perhaps in one verse,—a poem of great imaginative quality, it is a fine piece, and it is quoted here not only because it is so well known, and has appealed so widely as to include among its admirers men of such dissimilar minds as Edgar Allan Poe,—who is America's greatest literary artist—and Abraham Lincoln,—but also because it illustrates the qualities which made Oliver Wendell Holmes a supreme writer of *vers d'occasion*.

The best poems that are included under this generalisation depend upon both humour and pathos for their effect, but the humour must never degenerate into jocosity, nor the pathos become harrowing. It is better if the pathos induce a sigh, rather than force a tear, and the humour call for a smile, rather than compel laughter. Dr. Holmes wrote many poems in which humour and pathos are delicately blended, but, of these, "The Last Leaf" is the supreme example:—

THE LAST LEAF.

I saw him once before,
As he passed by the door,
 And again
The pavement stones resound
As he totters o'er the ground
 With his cane.

They say that in his prime,
Ere the pruning-knife of Time
 Cut him down,
Not a better man was found
By the Crier on his round
 Through the town.

But now he walks the streets,
And he looks at all he meets
 Sad and wan.
And he shakes his feeble head
That it seems as if he said,
 “ They are gone.”

The mossy marbles rest
On the lips that he has prest
 In their bloom,
And the names he loved to hear
Have been carved for many a year
 On the tomb.

My grandmamma has said—
Poor old lady, she is dead
 Long ago—
That he had a Roman nose,
And his cheek was like a rose
 In the snow.

But now his nose is thin,
 And it rests upon his chin
 Like a staff ;
 And a crook is in his back,
 And a melancholy crack
 In his laugh.

I know it is a sin
 For me to sit and grin
 At him here ;
 But the old three-cornered hat,
 And the breeches and all that
 Are so queer !

And if I should live to be
 The last leaf upon the tree
 In the spring,
 Let them smile as I do now
 At the old forsaken bough
 Where I cling.

“ The Treadmill Song ” and “ My Aunt ”
 are poems which exhibit the same qualities,
 and from the latter we quote three verses :—

My aunt ! My poor deluded aunt !
 Her hair is almost gray ;
 Why will she train that winter curl
 In such a spring-like way ?
 How can she lay her glasses down,
 And say she reads as well,
 When through a double convex lens
 She just makes out to spell ?

Her father—Grandpapa! forgive
 This erring lip its smiles—
 Vowed she should make the finest girl
 Within a hundred miles;
 He sent her to a stylish school;
 'Twas in her thirteenth June,
 And with her, as the rules required,
 Two towels and a spoon.

* * * *

Alas! nor chariot, nor barouche,
 Nor bandit cavalcade,
 Tore from the trembling father's arms
 His all-accomplished maid.
 For her how happy had it been!
 And Heaven had spared to me
 To see one sad, ungathered rose
 On my ancestral tree.

Holmes has been compared to almost all the humorous poets of England and America, but to little purpose. It is possible, if one fancies the task, to find quite a number of lines that remind one of Browning, and verses that might have been written by Moore, and, stranger still, a line reminiscent of Meredith, but we know quite well that the qualities which distinguish these poets bear no comparison with those that characterise Dr. Holmes' verse, and it is hardly nearer the truth to say he is like Hood or like Praed. He resembles Hood in the one particular that he has a rare

gift of humour, but as a poet he does not resemble Hood any more or as much as he does Goldsmith, and this insistence upon comparisons between Holmes and other writers of humorous verse has done much to injure his reputation by detracting from the individuality of it, and by constantly calling attention to one aspect of it.

We are apt to take him up expecting to be made to laugh, and this attitude is not even conducive to our appreciating his humorous poems, which contain so many subtleties beside his jests. He was not a writer of rhymed jests, but a poet first, and a humorist afterwards, according to his own estimate, and it is fair to recollect this in reading his works or speaking of them. Before dealing with his distinctively humorous poems, a quotation may be given which is a beautiful example of another kind that is not very often mentioned.

Her hands are cold ; her face is white ;
No more her pulses come and go ;
Her eyes are shut to life and light ;
Fold the white vesture, snow on snow,
And lay her where the violets blow.

But not beneath a graven stone,
To plead for tears with alien eyes ;
A slender cross of wood alone
Shall say that here a maiden lies
In peace beneath the peaceful skies.

And gray old trees of hugest limb
 Shall wheel their circling shadows round
 To make the scorching sunlight dim
 That drinks the greenness from the ground,
 And drop their dead leaves on her mound.

* * * *

When, turning round their dial-track,
 Eastward the lengthening shadows pass,
 Her little mourners, clad in black,
 The cricket, sliding through the grass,
 Shall pipe for her an evening mass.

At last the rootlets of the trees
 Shall find the prison where she lies,
 And bear the buried dust they seize
 In leaves and blossoms to the skies.
 So may the soul that warmed it rise!

—*Under the Violets.*

It is quite possible to find among Holmes' humorous poems a verse here and there in which the humour seems laboured, or the jest wedged in with difficulty, and occasionally one in which the puns are rapped out with annoying frequency, and irritate like the perpetual tapping of a small hammer; but, as a rule, the humour flows easily and generously through the poem, giving to the whole a rich flavour.

Where he tells a story he succeeds supremely, as in the "Deacon's Masterpiece"—that sly satire upon Calvinistic theology—"that was

built in such a logical way," and "Parson Turrell's Legacy."

These poems cannot be quoted from, but must be given entirely or not at all, and they are too long to allow of transcribing them here. Some verses may be quoted, however, "The Music Grinders"—a humorous poem almost as good as those mentioned, but written in another vein:—

There are three ways in which men take
 One's money from his purse,
 And very hard it is to tell
 Which of the three is worse ;
 But all of them are bad enough
 To make a body curse.

You're riding out some pleasant day,
 And counting up your gains ;
 A fellow jumps out from a bush
 And takes your horse's reins,
 Another hints some words about
 A bullet in your brains.

It's hard to meet such pressing friends
 In such a lonely spot ;
 It's very hard to lose your cash,
 But harder to be shot ;
 And so you take your wallet out,
 Though you would rather not.

* * * *

You're sitting on your window-seat
 Beneath a cloudless moon :
 You hear a sound, that seems to wear
 The semblance of a tune ;

As if a broken fife should strive
To drown a cracked bassoon.

Poor "Home, sweet home" should seem to be
A very dismal place :
Your "Auld Acquaintance," all at once,
Is altered in the face ;
Their discords sting through Burns and Moore,
Like hedgehogs dressed in lace.

But hark ! the air again is still,
The music all is ground,
And silence, like a poultice, comes
To heal the blows of sound ;
It cannot be—it is—it is—
A hat is going round !

One class of humorous poems he made peculiarly his own, to which "The Stethoscope Song" and "Nux Postcœantica" belong, and whose titles sufficiently indicate their medical character. From the first of these—which is a little overdone, and in which an excellent idea is made to serve too long a turn—the following verses are taken :—

There was a young man in Boston town,
He bought a stethoscope nice and new,
All mounted, and finished, and polished down,
With an ivory cap and a stopper, too.

It happened a spider within did crawl,
And spun him a web of ample size,
Wherein there chanced one day to fall
A couple of very impudent flies.

This first was a bottle-fly, big and blue,
The second was smaller, and thin and long,
So there was a concert between the two,
Like an octave flat and a tavern gong.

Now, being from Paris but recently,
This fine young man would show his skill,—
And so they gave him, his hand to try,
A hospital patient extremely ill.

Some said that his liver was short of bile,
And some that his heart was over-size,
While some kept arguing all the while
He was crammed with tubercles up to his eyes.

This fine young man then up stepped he,
And all the doctors made a pause,
Said he,—“The man must die, you see,
By the fifty-seventh of Louis’s laws.”

And from “Nux Postcœnatica”—a poem
written somewhere in the forties—the following
verses are interesting as containing some
humorous reflections upon his own career as
a doctor and certainly containing some truth :—

Besides—my prospects—don’t you know that people
won’t employ

A man that wrongs his manliness by laughing like a
boy ?

And suspect the azure blossom that unfolds upon a shoot,
As if wisdom’s old potato could not flourish at its root ?

It’s a very fine reflection, when you’re etching out a
smile

On a copperplate of faces that would stretch at least
a mile,

That, what with sneers from enemies, and cheapening
shrugs of friends,
It will cost you all the earnings that a month of labour
lends !

It's a vastly pleasing prospect when you're screwing out
a laugh,
That your very next year's income is diminished by a
half,
And a little boy trips barefoot that Pegasus may go,
And the baby's milk is watered that your Helicon may
flow.

From the same poem we quote a verse which
is an example of a humorous style he seldom
indulged :—

Why, if Columbus should be there, the company would
beg
He'd show that little trick of his of balancing the egg !
Milton to Stilton would give in, and Solomon to Salmon,
And Roger Bacon be a bore, and Francis Bacon gammon !

Holmes has written humorous verse in many veins. Sometimes he is whimsical, and his verse is full of quaint turns of thought and expression ; sometimes hilarious ; sometimes indulging in the punning style, or playing upon words ; or again giving his humorous verse a satiric touch, or lending satire the wings of humour to carry it swiftly home. If the reader wishes to see Oliver Wendell Holmes at his worst, he might turn to the poem entitled, " Evening " (by a tailor), which is dreadfully laboured ; and if he wish to read

one of his early efforts, which has been far more popular than it deserves, he should turn to the "Spectre Rig."

His patriotic poems,—of which he wrote a good number—are worthy of remark, not only because he wrote one in his youth which stirred his generation, and is capable of rousing us to-day, but because they exemplify his intense Conservatism, as well as his intense Americanism.

We have spoken chiefly of the shorter pieces, but he composed some longer poems in the style which he so loved, and which is so noticeable a feature of the eighteenth century. In this style—the rhymed couplet—he wrote the "Metrical Essay," which he read before the Phi Beta Kappa Society, and which is interesting in itself, apart from the fact that it exemplifies many of the qualities and some of the defects of the poetry of his masters.

Miss Mitford, who was the first to bring Holmes' poetry to great notice in England, remarks his journey to the eighteenth century, and urges the poets of her own day to follow his example, for she appreciated the polish and the clear-cut style of his verse. The advice was not good in her day, and, happily the poets did not follow it, but the eighteenth century was suffering a good deal of abuse at that time, from which it has since been

rescued, and it was well to be reminded of the peculiar excellencies of the poetry of that age.

Eighteenth century poetry is largely the poetry of analysis—the analysis of manners and customs—and Holmes belonged to this century in so far as he was an observer rather than an interpreter.

One is forcibly reminded of Dryden while reading the “Metrical Essay,” and frequent passages from his poems in this style recall Goldsmith. The following lines show Holmes at his best in this form of composition :—

The bloodless sickle lent the warriors steel,
 The harvest bowed beneath his chariot wheel,
 Where late the wood-dove sheltered her repose
 The raven waited for the conflict's close.
 The cuirassed sentry walked his sleepless round,
 Where Daphne smiled or Amaryllis frowned,
 Where timid minstrels sung their blushing charms,
 Some wild Tyrtæus called aloud, ‘To Arms!’”

—*Metrical Essay.*

And these antithetical lines show that he had learned from his masters in this style something beside their excellencies :—

The thrill of triumph and the gasp of woe,
 The tender parting, and the glad return
 The festal banquet and the festal urn.

—*Metrical Essay.*

The most noticeable feature about Holmes as a poet, when we remember he was writing

between 1830 and 1890, is that he was not touched with the self-consciousness which characterises all our modern poets, any more than he was touched by the transcendentalism which was a growth of his own time and country.

He wrote no intimate poetry, or, as he would call it, poetry of self-exposure, and never did fairly appreciate many of those poets who were writing in his time and whom he felt were cursed by over-sensibility, and weakened by their habits of introspection. He called their genius a kind of moonlight genius, given them by way of compensation for their imperfections of Nature, and he had little appreciation of their longing and loving and aspiring. He felt the kind of exhibition of themselves which this poetry offered was insufferable weakness.

In the "Metrical Essay" he speaks of a race of poets bred "from decay as fungus growths arise," who are "tired of the world whose joys they never knew," and he bids the "gentle maid" beware of their syren song. But his own poetry would have been better if he had been able to catch from them their love of words, and their haunting music.

His verse was clear and epigrammatic, as became a lover of Pope, and often didactic as became the son of a Calvinistic minister,

but it was not often musical ; he seldom wrote a verse that sings itself into our memory.

He wrote his most excellent poems when he had a story or a character or an incident definitely in his mind, as in the case of " Agnes," and " The Last Leaf," which latter poem was suggested by the sight of old Major Melville in his cocked hat and breeches ; but he seldom penetrates " into that region where the air is music," or heard " those primal warblings " which it is the poets' highest mission to write down, without adding to them or without taking away.

Holmes was not gifted with a large imagination. " For imagination he offers us fancy, which, however light and sportive it may be, is rarely creative. Instead of ideality he gives us conceits that are often apt, often graceful, and often, it must be added, pushed too far."

Nor was he gifted with deep perception, but he possessed a very keen and ready perception of much that lay near the surface of life, and he had a bright fancy, and was felicitous in the use of apt and quaint illustration and beautiful simile, which lift his verse out of the commonplace, and save him from having frequent recourse to the poet's stock-in-trade.

It is a little remarkable that one who wrote so much poetry, some of which is excellent,

should so seldom have written a verse or a line that prove his kinship with the truly great poets.

The works of the minor poets contain passages or single lines that can only be attributed to the highest imagination, to a sudden and rare endowment, that send us to the work of the greatest poets for comparison. Ellery Channing wrote :—

If my bark sink, 'tis to another sea,
and this line, and some others from Mr. Hardy
bear the authentic mark :—

The old grey dial that points the bloody hour.
Quotations from the great poets to illustrate
our meaning would be easy :—

The marble index of a mind for ever
Voyaging through strange seas of thought, alone,
from Wordsworth ; or Byron's
His eyes were with his heart, and that was far away.

We do not mean that Oliver Wendell Holmes did not write lines like these, but that he wrote little, if anything, that was born of so high a flight as these. His poems were happy renderings rather than conceptions. He did not often brood, but as we have seen, he occasionally wrote a poem which suggests that he was capable of taking a higher place as a poet, if he had been willing to pay the price of his popularity.

His poetry is as free from repellent egotism as was his life, and the qualities that endeared him as a man to those who knew him, endear him to his readers through his verse.

It would not be well to leave his poetry without remembering the beautiful descriptive passages that abound in it, and quoting these two splendid lines :—

The splendthrift crocus, bursting through the mould,
Naked and shivering with his cup of gold,

nor must one forget the few poems so delicately wrought, and so unlike his genius, of which this quotation from "The Toadstool" is an example :—

She does not glow in a painted vest,
And she never blooms on the maiden's breast ;
But she comes, as the saintly sisters do,
In a modest suit of a Quaker hue.
And, when the stars in the evening skies
Are weeping dew from their gentle eyes,
The toad comes out from his hermit-cell,
The tale of his faithful love to tell.
O there is light in her lover's glance,
That flies to her heart like a silver lance ;
His breeches are made of spotted skin,
His jacket is tight, and his pumps are thin ;
In a cloudless night you may hear his song,
As its pensive melody floats along,
And, if you will look by the moonlight fair,
The trembling form of the toad is there.

He wrote many hymns which are justly entitled to be called poetry, and he desired

that he might be remembered by a few of them, and it is likely that his hymns will abide when his other work is forgotten.

O Love Divine, that stooped to share
Our sharpest pang, our bitterest tear,
On Thee we cast each earth-born care,
We smile at pain while Thou art near!

Though long the weary way we tread,
And sorrow crown each lingering year,
No path we shun, no darkness dread
Our hearts still whispering, "Thou art near!"

When drooping pleasure turns to grief,
And trembling faith is changed to fear,
The murmuring wind, the quivering leaf,
Shall softly tell us, "Thou art near."

On Thee we fling our burdening woe,
O Love divine, for ever dear,
Content to suffer while we know,
Living and dying, Thou art near!

—*Hymn of Trust.*

CHAPTER VI.

THE PROFESSOR.

The spring-tides are past, but no billow may reach
The spoils they have landed far up on the beach.

—*Our Banker.*

FROM 1857, Dr. Holmes was embarked upon a literary career. He retained his lectureship in Anatomy for a number of years, but apart from this connection he was a truant from his profession, and the incidents of his life—or rather those that are of public interest—resolve themselves chiefly into the production of his various works, and the pleasures and trials incidental to the literary life.

From the time of the appearance of his first papers in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Oliver Wendell Holmes has assumed the title of the “Autocrat” in his readers’ minds, but the mild benignity and the genial humour that seem to characterise our impression of him to-day do not fairly represent the vigour, and even daring, of the “Autocrat” of 1857.

The literary instrument he chose allowed him to “teach without being didactic, and

preach without sermonising," but his vigilant and independent mind, and his remarkable sincerity did not allow him to speak doubtfully where his own opinion would offend, nor to turn his attention from subjects and phases of life on which his own opinion was antagonistic to the general mind. Many of his views that were dubbed heretical and infidel, have passed into the air we breath, and what was considered advanced in his day indicates a too conservative mind in ours.

He suffered a good deal of reproach on the one hand for being a step in advance of his contemporaries, but there were those on the other who accused him of attaching excessive importance to conventionalities of dress and manner and speech, and charged him with using his influence to starve and paralyse literary originality.

These matters are mentioned here to remind the reader that the "Autocrat" was in mid-life, and that far from leading a leisured life in a mellow and tempered atmosphere, he was a vigorous combatant, and one who was often challenged.

The papers of the "Autocrat," however, received more praise than they excited criticism, and they were accepted, or rather acclaimed by the reading public with that good judgment which it not infrequently evinces in literary

matters, and have ever since retained the high position that was accorded them on their first appearance.

These papers did much to keep the *Atlantic Monthly* floating at a time of great depression, when most people looked carefully at a twenty-five cent. piece before investing it in a current periodical.

Simultaneous with the appearance of the *Atlantic Monthly*, and perhaps arising out of it, there sprang up the Saturday Club, which included among its members most of the contributors to the *Atlantic*, and some notable men besides. Holmes was the best asset of his publishers, and he became the most honoured presence at the Club meetings, and in return he attached immense prestige to this gathering, comparing it to the famous knot of literary men who met together in the eighteenth century, and calling Parker's Hotel which they frequented, the Will's Coffee-house of Boston.

Outside the sacred penetralia which were shut within his own front door, nothing else in Dr. Holmes' life gave him so much pleasure as did this club. He loved it; he hugged the thought of it; and if Boston was to him the hub of the Universe, the club was certainly the hub of Boston.

There is something a little tender about his disproportionate view of this gathering, but

it certainly claimed among its members the most notable literary men of America—Emerson, Hawthorne, Motley, Lowell, Whittier, Longfellow—these are but a few of those who met together ; but Dr. Holmes was the only one who went quite regularly, and continued to go until the company “ was more of ghosts than of flesh and blood ” to him.

“ I carry a stranger there now and then,” he writes in 1883, “ and introduce him to the members who happen to be there, and then say—‘ There at the end used to sit Agassiz—here at this end Longfellow—Emerson used to be there, and Lowell often next him—— ’ ”

It was at the Club, if we could have met him there, that we should have heard him rival his own published works. He was a brilliant conversationalist, and his nimble wit, and full mind and gracious manner readily secured him the hearing of all his *confrères*, and even their forbearance when he monopolised the talk, as was sometimes the case, for one who had listened to many famous talkers and confessed that Holmes and Lowell were the most brilliant of them all, had to admit that he had not learned the London art of repression ; and Dr. Holmes was aware that he had a tendency to do more than his share, for in speaking of a man he had met at the Club, he complains that he was a great talker, and made it necessary for others to watch for their

innings; "but," he adds slyly, "I guess he has to, once in a while, for I have a tendency myself to loquacity."

But all who heard him were willing to give him precedence. He was not a great talker, in the vulgar sense, but a great conversationalist, and we can gather from his books that he conceived very highly of conversation, and was one of the few who regarded it as a fine art. At the Club he found a fitting audience, and a large part of his influence during his life-time may be well attributed to his brilliant powers in this direction.

A few quotations will show what importance he attached to conversation, and in what light he regarded it:—

"Remember," he says, "that talking is one of the fine arts, the noblest, the most important and the most difficult, and that its fluent harmonies may be spoiled by the intrusion of a single harsh note. Therefore conversation which is suggestive rather than argumentative, which lets out the most of each talker's results of thought, is commonly the pleasantest and the most profitable."

And this passage contains a fine idea:—

What are the great faults of conversation? Want of ideas, want of words, want of manners. . . I don't doubt it, but I will tell you what I have found spoil more good conversation than anything else: long arguments on special points between people who differ on the fundamental principles upon which these points depend.

No men can have satisfactory relations with each other until they have agreed on certain ultimata of belief not to be disturbed in ordinary conversation. . . . Talking is like playing on the harp ; there is as much in laying the hand on the strings to stop their vibrations as in twanging them to bring out their music.

But although Oliver Wendell Holmes enjoyed and excelled in conversation, he considered himself a good listener. He says :—

I won't deny that on rare occasions, when I have been in company with gentlemen who preferred listening, that I have been guilty of usurping the conversation ;

but he goes on to say,

If a man can tell me a fact which subtends an appreciable angle in the horizon of my thought, I am as receptive as the contribution-box in a congregation of coloured brethren.

For all this declaration he was somewhat exacting as a listener, and was impatient of talkers with " jerky minds " who " say bright things on all possible subjects, but their zigzags rack you to death."

" The business of conversation," he says, " is a very serious matter. There are men that it weakens one to talk with an hour more than a day's fasting would do. It is better to lose a pint of blood from your veins than to have a nerve tapped."

But brilliant as his talk was, we have no record of it except in so far as he was his own

Boswell, and apart from this we have nothing preserved but the tradition of his brilliance and a few legendary stories.

Dr. Holmes' growing reputation made him the subject of a large correspondence.

Poverty comes pleading, not for charity for the most part, but imploring us to find a purchaser for its unmarketable wares. The unreadable author particularly requests us to make a critical examination of his book—as if he wanted anything else but our praise.

But he treated all his correspondents with wonderful charity and helpfulness, even the host of literary mediocrities and the authors or authoresses who sent the slim volumes of verses to him.

Those attenuated volumes of poetry in fancy bindings open their covers at one like so many little unfledged birds, and one does so long to drop a worm in—a worm in the shape of a kind, soft word for the poor fledgling.

He no doubt gave more praise than was deserved out of pure good nature, but our interest in the correspondence which Dr. Holmes' reputation thrust him into is not because it deepens our admiration of his charity and kindly nature, but because it indicates his good judgment and critical ability, although he never would allow himself to undertake the work of a professional critic, because he did so hate blaming and love praising. An instance

of his discernment is afforded by this story relating to one of his correspondents:—

He one day answered an anonymous letter he had received, asking his opinion of some verses that were enclosed, to which he replied by way of encouraging his unknown correspondent, and promptly forgot the matter. Years later a man called upon him and reminded him of the circumstance, and introduced himself as the writer of the anonymous letter—Bret Harte.

He perhaps was no more plagued with unknown correspondents and lion-hunters than other men of reputation, but he accepted his "crosses" with more humour than others, and when asked one day how he felt when quite a number of people had made it their business to visit him, he replied, "Like a young elephant at the Zoo with a cheap excursion party on its back."

He was terribly pestered by autograph seekers and beggars of all description, but his charity to all his correspondents, and his desire that no one's feelings should be hurt, and no opportunity overlooked that would allow him to be of service, increased the burden immensely.

From what my correspondents tell me I must infer that I have established a dangerous reputation for willingness to answer all sorts of letters,

he says, and the strain became too great to be borne in later life.

Writing when he was eighty years old, he says :—

It has occurred to me that it might be profitable to reproduce some of my unwritten answers,

and proceeds,

Want my autograph, do you ? And don't know how to spell my name ? An a for an e in my middle name.

Think the lines you mention are by far the best I ever wrote, hey ? Well, I didn't write those lines. What is more I think they are as detestable a string of rhymes as I could wish my worst enemy . . .

but he never did reply in any but a genial way.

His treatment of those who bothered him with their troubles or aspirations or requirements was kindly to an almost excessive degree, but it was because he adopted this attitude towards all that he was able to be more useful to a larger number of people than any other man of letters at his time. But his correspondence was not all of this troublesome character, and he received innumerable letters of appreciation to which he was very susceptible. To this class of his unknown friends he writes :—

Be assured that a writer is always rendered happier by being told that he has made a fellow-being wiser or better, or even contributed to his harmless entertainment.

This trial of an author's life, as it is called, is referred to here because it commenced for Dr. Holmes with the publication of the "Autocrat," and went on increasing until the day of his death; and not only allowed him opportunities of exercising his too-ready charity, but owing to the intimacy which he so quickly establishes between himself and his readers, his correspondents were apt to take him into their confidence in a more than ordinary degree which deepened his experience of life and evoked his sympathy and developed his nature in many ways.

The "Professor" followed on the heels of the "Autocrat," and what has been said with regard to that book applies to the papers that ran through the *Atlantic* under the title of the "Professor of the Breakfast Table."

The "Professor" occupied the same chair as the "Autocrat," but he was a somewhat more ponderous figure. He discoursed of more serious subjects in a more serious way:—

The Professor was more outspoken on religious subjects, and brought down a great deal of hard language on himself and the author to whom he owed his existence. I suppose he may have used some irritating expressions unconsciously but not unscientiously I am sure.

So writes Oliver Wendell Holmes long afterwards, and in speaking of the preference of some for the "Professor," he says:—

I confess that I prefer my champagne in its first burst of gaseous enthusiasm, but if my guest likes it better after it has stood awhile, I am pleased to accommodate him. The first series came from my mind almost with an explosion. . . It startled me a little to see what I had written, and to hear what people said about it."

And most of us are of the author's opinion.

James Russell Lowell, however, said with respect to the "Professor," that Dr. Holmes was getting his second wind, which has been taken to mean that he preferred the second series; but he probably inferred that the "Professor" had settled down to a style and pace that had more staying power than the first swift measure.

Some of the opinions of the "Professor" may be noticed when we speak of Dr. Holmes' attitude to religion; but it remains to be said here that one character in the book—that of "Little Boston"—is memorable, and is probably the best of all the characters in the Breakfast Table series. Dr. Holmes improved in character drawing as he went on, and could really depict character well, although he never developed any considerable constructive ability in this series, or when he came to write his novels.

It is well to note before leaving the "Professor" that if the book is not such a literary wonder as its predecessor, not so sparkling,

so fresh, so audacious, yet it reveals the fact that a larger part of the author's nature had been baptised into experience, and there is often something arresting both in the style and the matter that we do not find in the "Autocrat."

Take this passage, for instance:—

Riding along over a rocky road suddenly the slow monotonous grinding of the crushing gravel changes to a deep heavy rumble. There is a great hollow under your feet, a huge, unsunned cavern. Deep, deep, beneath you it arches its awful vault, and far away it stretches its winding galleries, their roofs dripping into streams where fishes have been swimming and spawning in the dark until their scales are white as milk, and their eyes have withered out—obsolete and useless.

So it is in life. We jog quietly along, meeting the same faces, grinding over the same thoughts, now and then jarring against an obstacle we cannot crush, sometimes bringing up short against a disappointment, but still working along the creaking and rattling and grating and jerking that belong to the journey of life. . . Suddenly we hear the deep underground reverberation that reveals the unsuspected depth of some abyss of thought or passion beneath us.

The "Poet" appeared eleven years later, but may be mentioned here.

"This series was not so much a continuation as a resurrection," says Dr. Holmes, and it is its richness in poetic reminiscence that alone makes the "Poet" worthy to stand beside the companion volumes. It has been

likened to wine from the third pressing of grapes of a wonderful growth, and the simile is a good one. Dr. Holmes wrote the book to please himself, he tells us, and to say some things that he would be the better for getting rid of; but its chief interest for us to-day is found in the haunting chapter on his boyhood, and the wistful glances he turns toward the past.

All three of these books were set with poems as with jewels, but those contained in the "Autocrat" are easily the best, and in fact there can be little doubt that the "Autocrat" contains the best things Oliver Wendell Holmes had to say; and, as the "Professor" wittily hints, it was a question as to whether there was anything left for him to suck out of creation after his lively friend had had his straw in the bung-hole of the Universe.

Once more, late in life, when he had arrived at three-score-and-twenty, as he used to say, he returned to the conversational style of his earlier works, and wrote the series of papers entitled "Over the Tea-cups." His own uncertainty about these papers, and his almost touching anxiety that they might be found worth reading, is sufficient indication that we need not look for anything comparable to his brilliant challenge to the literary world.

"I know," he says, "that it is a hazardous experiment to address myself again to a public which in days long

past has given me a gracious welcome, and some will say he has had his day ; why can't he be content ? ”

He reminds his readers that the morning cup of coffee has an exhilaration about it which the cheering influence of the afternoon or evening cup of tea cannot be expected to reproduce, and he advises them not to compare the quiet talks over the tea-table to the early and vigorous conversation across the breakfast table.

Comparison, however, was bound to be instituted, and “ Over the Tea-cups ” must take a minor place among the works of Oliver Wendell Holmes. It is far, however, from being uninteresting or unreadable ; it is one of those sedative books which old people will perhaps even prefer to the mentally exciting pages which he wrote in mid life. The papers contain an old man's reflections on every phase of life that has come within his experience. He discourses in a quiet but cheery way of music,—of art,—of doctors and architects,—of war and religion,—of realism in literature and life,—of his correspondence, and his fame, and his old age. The book is rich in charity and the wisdom which comes of charity, and free from that lachrymose tendency which may so easily spoil an old man's musings.

Humour and vivacity gleam and sparkle among the pages, but it is only in the “ Broom-

stick Train " that the old spirit flashes out as though to defy the increasing years. This remarkable poem is particularly noteworthy as the work of one so advanced in age, but it is what we might have expected of him in his earlier days, and it may be better to give a quotation that is chosen from among many similar passages, and which indicates the difference in temper between his earlier and later work. The satire is not so pointed, nor the humour so pungent, and what was wistful in the "Poet of the Breakfast Table" has become very tender in this book :—

All reflecting persons, even those whose minds have been half palsied by the deadly dogmas which have done all they could to disorganise their thinking powers—all reflecting persons must recognise in looking back over a long life how largely their creeds, their course of life, their wisdom and unwisdom, their whole characters were shaped by the conditions which surround them.

Little children they come from the hands of the Father of all ; little children, in their helplessness, their ignorance, they are going back to Him. They cannot help feeling that they are to be transferred from the rude embrace of the boisterous elements to arms that will receive them tenderly.

CHAPTER VII.

NOVELIST.

Can the Infinite be supposed to shift the responsibility of the ultimate destiny of any created thing to the finite? I doubt.
—*Master Byles Gridley.*

“SOME of you boarders ask me,” says the “Autocrat,” “why I don’t write a story or a novel or something of that kind. That every articulately speaking human being has in him stuff for one novel in three volumes duodecimo has long been with me a cherished belief. All which proves that I as an individual of the human family could write one novel or story at any rate, if I would.

“Why don’t I then? . . . I have sometimes thought it possible that I might be too dull to write such a story as I should wish to write. And, finally, I think it very likely I shall write a story one of these days.”

From this remark, and even from the form and the characters of the “Autocrat” and the “Professor,” the reader might have anticipated that these papers would be followed by a novel.

Not even the genius of Oliver Wendell Holmes could support a writer through a number of works if he continued to adopt the literary form of the “Autocrat,” and he probably

had the wisdom to see that a change (of form) was desirable, as well as the ambition to write something more constructive.

“The Professor’s Story”—or “Elsie Venner”—as it is now called, began to appear in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1860, and at once brought down a shower of criticism from all classes and conditions of men.

Much of the criticism which the book received, as a work of art, must be repeated to-day, but the strictures of theologians and preachers can, almost without exception, be happily forgotten.

The first criticism the book suggests, and it is one that has been passed by many, is that the work is not organic,—there is no vital interplay between the various characters. These characters are sometimes well, and sometimes excellently drawn, but they stand alone as figures and buttresses and pillars that have not yet been built into a house.

A graver objection to some is that “Elsie Venner” is a novel with a purpose, or perhaps a novel of one idea, where almost every character is a little warped because of the author’s determination to make each one the means, not of developing the other characters, but of forwarding the one idea of the book.

The digressive and discursive style, too, detracts from the merit of “Elsie Venner”—so suitable a medium for conveying the

“ Autocrat’s ” mind to his readers, it is not a good instrument for heightening or developing a tragedy. But for all this the book was hailed and is still accepted as a remarkable one; and is still worth reading, not only for the story, not only because it is the challenge of a great humanitarian to an atrocious doctrine, but also because its pages are full of a genial wisdom, and contain so much that is characteristic of the author, and by which we know his work.

One can recognise the “ Autocrat’s ” humour in the treatment of the concerns of the Sprowdle family; his benignity shines in the face of Doctor Kerridge, who drives Dick Venner forty miles out of the parish after his mean and dastardly attempt upon the life of Bernard Langdon, and sends him on his way not with a curse, but with fatherly emotion, and almost with a blessing. One is at home with Dr. Honeywood, whose kindly nature must needs ameliorate his creed, before he can apply it to the specific lives and actions of his parishioners.

One recognises the author’s predilection for the neat, athletic man in the gusto with which he tells of Bernard Langdon’s management of the hulking butcher, who had been more than a match for his former master; and one recollects Dr. Holmes’ pride at having

seen "Plenipotentiary" win the Derby, and his love of his profession because, among other things, it compelled him to keep a horse, in the description of the doctor's mare, Cassia, and the famous description of Major Rowen's knowledge of horses. "He knew a neat, snug hoof, a delicate pastern, a broad haunch, a deep chest, a close-ribbed up barrel. . . . He was not to be taken in by your thick jointed, heavy-headed cattle without any go in them."

But these are minor, although interesting, characteristics. The author had one purpose in writing "Elsie Venner," and in order to speak of that it is necessary very briefly to indicate the story.

The first character we are introduced to is Bernard Langdon, who is a principal figure during the whole of the story. He is a medical student who finds himself unable to continue his study on account of the decline of the family fortune, and applies to his professor for a certificate of qualification, in order to enable him to obtain an appointment as a schoolmaster. He is a character Kingsley would have enjoyed—keen, intellectually and physically fit, with all the natural instincts well-developed, and all under excellent control. Dr. Holmes was fond of his hero, and spared no pains in developing his character.

Bernard Langdon discharges his duties so well at one school that he soon finds the way open to a better appointment at the Apollinian Institute for Girls at Rocklands, where the interest of the story centres.

Here we are introduced to Helen Darley—one of the assistant teachers, and one of those gentle women who go about the world sacrificing themselves to their sense of duty—and to Silas Peckham, the principal—a detestable man, mean in his economies, mean in his generousities, and in all his relationships.

It is at this school that we meet Elsie Venner—the heroine of the story if she may be called so—a girl of eighteen, with more than beauty enough to make her attractive, but with other attributes sufficiently indicated in the story to make her, not repulsive, but a weird and fearful fascination.

Elsie is the daughter and only child of Dudley Venner—a gloomy and troubled shadow moving through the story—whose wife had died in giving birth to her.

The mother had fatally endowed her child before its birth, as she had been bitten a short time previously by one of the rattlesnakes that haunted the ledges of the mountains close to Dudley Mansion.

No one knows the reason for Elsie's strange influence and ungovernable moods but her

father, and old Sophy, the nurse, and the doctor, and these three do their utmost to protect her from fatal mischance.

Elsie herself is only dimly aware of the impassable gulf which separates her from real intimacy with other people, and as, towards the end of the story, the lower nature begins to die and she begins to feel the separation more deeply, she becomes an intensely pathetic figure.

From our first introduction in the following quotation, to the end of the story, the mystery of her personality is suggested by the most subtle touches. Everything about the girl, her habits, her dress, her hair, her instincts, her influence—are suggestive of something abnormal and haunting :—

She was a splendid, scowling beauty ; black-browed, with a flash of white teeth which was always like a surprise when her lips parted. She wore a chequered dress of a curious pattern, and a camel's hair scarf twisted a little fantastically about her. She went to her seat—and sitting down began playing listlessly with her gold chain, coiling and uncoiling it about her slender wrist, and braiding it in with her long delicate fingers. Presently she looked up. Black, piercing eyes, not large—a low forehead, as low as that of Clytie in the Townley bust,—black hair twisted in heavy braids, a face that one could not help looking at for its beauty, yet that one wanted to look away from for something in its expression, and could not for those diamond eyes.

The description is heightened as the story progresses by such a touch as this :—

What was the slight peculiarity of her enunciation ? Not a lisp, certainly ; but the least possible imperfection in articulating some of the lingual sounds.

And such suggestive sentences as the following :

She threw her head back ; her eyes narrowed and her forehead drawn down, so that Dick thought her head actually flattened itself.

Her habit of wandering unharmed among the haunts of the crotalus, and her paralysing influence upon people, especially Helen Darley, are insisted upon to haunt the mind with the ophidian characteristics of the beautiful girl.

She falls in love with Bernard Langdon, and he can only offer her friendship. She dies just as it seems that the serpent nature was about to surrender to the higher element of her being. This work has been called a "medicated" novel, and Dr. Holmes says it *is* a medicated novel, so that anyone who wishes to read for mere amusement need not trouble himself with a story written with a different end in view.

The origin of the story was a physiological conception fertilised by a theological idea ; and was written with the object of testing the doctrine of original sin, and of inquiring whether Elsie Venner, poisoned by the venom of a

crotalus before she was born, was morally responsible, and of insisting upon the author's belief that she was the proper object of Divine pity, and not of Divine wrath.

But this was not all that Dr. Holmes intended. He was pretty certain of obtaining the reader's pity and absolution,—if these were required—for his heroine ; but he leads us on to the larger consideration, and asks the more important question as to whether there was any difference between her position at the bar of judgment—human and divine—and that of the unfortunate victim who received a moral poison from a remote ancestor before he drew his first breath.

This was the rock of offence to many of his contemporaries—his insistence upon the fact that inherited predispositions limit the sphere of the will and of moral accountability, and his plea that bad men should be treated as if they were insane—they are insane, out of health morally, he says.

All this is familiar to us to-day, and few will take offence at anything he said in his desire to humanise theology, which, he said, in writing to James Freeman Clarke, “ has been largely diabolology.”

But his critics and his friends were ready to take alarm and express disapprobation of his “ dangerous theory,” especially as it

developed their own responsibility in a somewhat startling manner.

What if you are drinking a little too much wine and smoking a little too much tobacco, and your son takes after you and so your poor grandson's brain being a little injured in physical texture, he loses the fine moral sense in which you pride yourself, and doesn't see the difference between signing another man's name to a draft, and his own ?

Dr. Holmes received the somewhat abusive criticism he was subject to without feeling any desire to retaliate. "Elsie Venner" was more than a novel: it was one of the instruments he used to prosecute what was possibly the greatest purpose of his life,—“to make men charitable and soften legal and theological barbarism.”

His purpose has been partly fulfilled, and he certainly contributed to effect it; but it must be remembered that the ages were working with him, and have still much to do.

It cannot be denied that this book, and, in fact, Oliver Wendell Holmes' work as a whole, has more than a tendency to break down the sense of individual responsibility, and it is a question whether Dick Venner should have been sent off with money and a blessing; and other characters and phases of character are treated with a like indulgence which one may call excessive without being

open to the charge of narrowness or harshness.

Dr. Holmes did not believe in the responsibility of idiots. "He did not believe new-born babes were morally answerable for other people's acts; he thought a man with a crooked spine would never be called to account for not walking straight; he thought if the crook was in the brain instead of in the back he could not fairly be blamed for any consequence of this natural defect, whatever lawyers and doctors might call it," and he preferred to teach men the charity that might sometimes let the guilty go unpunished rather than that they should rest in a creed that had often erred on the other side, and tended to dehumanise.

Dr. Holmes lived long enough to hear his books spoken of without vituperation, and to see many of the lessons that he taught influence his own generation, and accepted by a younger.

CHAPTER VIII.

“THE GUARDIAN ANGEL.”

“There is nothing so important as the cultivation of of a high sense of personal responsibility, unless it be to recognise the limits of individual responsibility in our judgments of others.”

DR. HOLMES' painstaking research previous to writing “Elsie Venner” illustrates the care and labour with which he wrote all his books. He did not write anything in an off-handed and easy manner, although a casual reading of some of his work might suggest that he did so.

Before commencing to write his first novel, “he explored all printed knowledge concerning the reptiles and their venom.” He drew upon his friend, Dr. Weir Mitchell, who knew all there was to be known about the rattle-snake, and he made himself familiar with all the legendary and authentic stories of those who inherited the serpent nature in some degree.

In addition to this, he was so anxious not to fail in making his character impart to the reader a sufficiently true and haunting sensation of her fatal endowment, that he procured a rattle-snake, which he kept at the Medical School for some months, and which he constantly and carefully observed.

He was as exacting in the production of all his works. Mr. Morse says:—"Not only when he dwelt upon, but when he even alluded to any topic whatever, whether in the way of science, or history, or argument, or idea, or of literary or theological discussion—whatever it might be—he made sure by minute investigation that his knowledge was thorough, and that his use and treatment were correct." Even when preparing an article on Jonathan Edwards, a man whose life and work he had been studying for years previously, he made volumes of notes, and referred to every well-known writer before setting pen to paper.

Dr. Holmes recreated himself from the exacting labour which his medical lectures and his literary work required of him during these years, with hobbies and interests of all kinds. He was an expert oarsman, and loved the long, sharp-pointed boats. He was keenly interested in horses, and was fond of all outdoor exercises. His walks were made doubly enjoyable by his photography—at which he was a

proficient—and his love of trees which he would fondly measure. He says:—

I want you to understand, in the first place, that I have a most intense, passionate fondness for trees in general, and have had several romantic attachments to certain trees in particular. Now, if you expect me to hold forth in a “scientific way” about my tree loves you are an anserine individual, and I must refer you to a dull friend who will discourse to you of such matters.

His leisure at home he spent with his microscope, or interested himself in the application of his scientific knowledge to some popular end, as in the stethoscope, and at one period he spent a good deal of time in a vain attempt to learn the violin.

He was a man who valued himself, and husbanded his strength both of mind and body. He never worked so desperately as to be unfit for work for a time, nor recreated himself to such an extent as to make his return to work unpalatable; body and mind helped each other, and he was able to turn his recreation to some literary account, as in those popular scientific articles which he wrote on the stethoscope and the daguerrotype, which have been republished in “Soundings in the Atlantic.”

Five years after the appearance of “Elsie Venner,” he published his second “medicated” novel under the title of “The Guardian Angel.” This book never created the same

interest as the earlier work, probably because it never excited such antagonism; but it is a more consistent work of art, and as a literary production, it must take the first place among his novels.

The author's protest "against the scholastic tendency to shift the total responsibility of all human action from the infinite to the finite" is not so urgent and not so inartistically obtruded upon the reader; he has more in mind those readers who prefer to skip the "Morals" in *Æsop's Fables*, and who read a work of fiction for the story, without interesting themselves very much in the psychological problem that the author has made it his business to suggest. The book abounds in arresting sentences and illustrations, such as the following:—

It is not in the words that others say to us, but in those other words which these make us say to ourselves that we find our gravest lesson and our sharpest rebuke.

It offers plenty of proof of the author's aptitude in expressing commonplace thought in an uncommon and striking manner:—

To know whether a minister young or still in flower is in safe or dangerous paths there are two psychometers. The first is the black broadcloth forming the knees of his pantaloons, the second the patch of carpet before his mirror. If the first is unworn and the second is frayed and threadbare, pray for him. If the first is worn and

shiny while the second keeps its pattern and texture, get him to pray for you.

The story itself has the advantage over its predecessor of being more probable, and the characters are drawn not only by a more practised hand, but with more fidelity to human life. Nothing could be better than the character of Byles Gridley on the one hand, and the cold and calculating egotism of Murray Bradshaw on the other; and the characters are handled with such skill in some chapters as to make the pictures of New England life in the early part of the nineteenth century not only faithful, but sufficiently excellent from an artistic point of view as to bear comparison with similar sketches to be found in the work of Jane Austin and Miss Mitford. This novel, of which Myrtle Hazard is the most important character, has not the tragic and even repulsive elements of “Elsie Venner,” although like the earlier work, it depends upon the pre-natal history of the heroine for its deeper significance.

It is a study in heredity, and aims at showing that our individual personality is by no means the single inhabitant of our bodies, but that our ancestors may enjoy a somewhat shadowy but real and self-conscious existence in our bodily tenement; and further still, that they may affect the course of our lives without our

being able to control this subtle determination, and therefore mitigate to a certain extent our individual responsibility.

Dr. Holmes was mindful of the abuse and misinterpretation he received at the hands of the critics after the publication of "Elsie Venner," and said now:—

Should any professional alarmist choose to confound the doctrine of limited responsibility with that which denies the existence of any self-determining power, he may be presumed to belong to the class of intellectual half-breeds, wearing the garb of civilisation and even the gown of scholarship. If we cannot follow the automatic machinery of nature into the mental and moral world, where it plays its part as much as in the bodily function, without being accused of "laying all that we are evil in to a divine thrusting on" we had better return at once to our old demonology.

The problem of the story is stated clearly in an early chapter, in which the author speaks of Myrtle's antecedents.

The instincts and qualities belonging to the ancestral traits which predominated in the conflict of mingled lives, lay in this child in embryo, waiting to come to maturity. Her earlier impulses may have been derived directly from her father and mother, but all the ancestors who have been mentioned and more or less obscurely many others came uppermost in their turn before the absolute and total result of their several forces had found its equilibrium in the character by which she was to be known as an individual. . . . The world, the flesh, the devil held mortgages on her life before its deed was put

into her hand, but sweet and gracious influences were also born with her and the battle of life was to be fought between them, God helping her in her need and her own free choice siding with one or the other.

And the same idea is practically suggested in Myrtle Hazard's vision, where she sees the figures of her ancestors and herself among them. They seem to be saying, “Breath! breath!” they each want to give expression to themselves and to work out their will through her young life. There was her father and mother among the shadows, a little more palpable than the rest; the hard-drinking and hearty Major, who had something about his life that Myrtle did not want to make a part of her's, but who seemed to have a kind of right in her, which compelled her to take what was left of his life in that shadow-like shape, and allow it a place in her being; there was the wild woman with the Indian blood in her veins, and a head-dress of feathers: “she kept as it were in the shadow, and I saw something of my own features in her face”; and there was Ruth Bradford, one of the guardian angels.

These all became part of her, and were lost in her own life as she returned from the strange and dreamy condition she had fallen into.

It was such a complex character as Myrtle Hazard that Dr. Holmes created for his purpose, and the chief interest of the story, and perhaps

the chief end of the author in writing it lies in the subtle characterisation of Myrtle as now the distinguishing traits of one ancestor, and now those of another seem to dominate her personality. The story is so well wrought that during different phases of Myrtle's life, we see without effort and without shock, the hint of another personality in her glance and her bearing, and another will determining her actions; especially is this the case in that dramatic incident of the tableaux, when Myrtle is dressed as an Indian woman to play the part of Pocahontas:—

It was a strange feeling that came over Myrtle. Had she never worn that painted robe before? Was it the first time that these strings of wampum had ever rattled upon her neck and arms? And could it be that the plume of eagles' feathers with which they crowned her dark lengthening locks had never shadowed her forehead until now. She felt herself carried back into the dim ages when the wilderness was untrodden save by the feet of its native lords. Think of her wild fancy as we may, she felt as if that dusky woman of her midnight vision were breathing for one hour through her lips.

So at other times it is her ancestor, Judith Pride, who looks through Myrtle's eyes and stands confessed in her dignified carriage, and determines the issue of the moment; or the martyr and guardian spirit of Anne Holyoake, or another of the dim and shadowy figures of her vision.

All through the story, from the moment we are introduced to the wayward child whose will cannot be broken by Silence Withers, to the end when love, in the person of Clement Lindsay, evokes her settled personality,—the life of Myrtle Hazard is the centre of a conflict between many individualities, each eager to claim a right in her life and to order her actions ; but she has two guardians angels in Anne Radford, her martyred ancestor, and Master Gridley, whose presence relieves every tense moment in the story.

The characters in “The Guardian Angel” hang together in a way that contrasts favourably with the more or less detached characters in the earlier novel, and the serious purpose of the author is not so needlessly emphasised nor expressed in such a manner as to excite antagonism ; on the other hand we are distinctly made to feel that had circumstances been a little different, and had Myrtle committed herself in consequence to a course of life and actions that are not usually condoned, we should not have been able to charge her with the whole responsibility, but should have been obliged to call up the dead to bear the burden.

In all his works, Dr Holmes carries his readers to the borderland of science and the theory of the limitation of human responsibility, which has found such a large acceptance during

recent years, owes a great deal to his sympathetic and urgent exposition; but it is well to remember that the idea remains a theory beyond a certain point, and that he attempted to carry it to a far greater length than science gave him sanction. In his anxiety to humanise theology and to teach men charity, he drew inferences from his scientific knowledge and his observation that do not bear a close scrutiny to-day.

When he was seventy-five years of age, Dr. Holmes attempted a third novel, which owed its origin, as did the preceding ones, to his obsession by the ideas that have been spoken about.

“A Mortal Antipathy” is a problem novel that has for its hero the rather absurd Maurice Kirkwood. During his babyhood Maurice receives a hurt by falling from the arms of his girl cousin, which is made accountable for his antipathy to young girls. He never could bear the sight of them, until he was rescued from a burning house, where he was alone upon a sick bed, by Euthymia, and saved not only from death but from his antipathy, by virtue of the nature of his deliverance and the sex of his deliverer.

The story is dull, and in fact absurd in parts; the creative impulse of the author, never very strong, was flagging, and although the idea of

the story is not an altogether improbable one, and was buttressed up with scientific evidence, it was beyond the author's declining powers to make it interesting, and contains a good deal that is tedious and not relevant to the story. Such names as the Terror, the Wonder, and the Enigma, do not attract, and all three of the characters that Dr. Holmes lent these names to are poor and in fact worse than poor when we compare them with his earlier work. Dr. Holmes himself had misgivings about this last novel of his, and writing to a friend who had read it and had been able to congratulate the author, he says:—

“I was thankful to think that it pleased you. I had no exalted anticipations about it; in fact, I was a little afraid that it would be scouted altogether beyond the bounds of credibility.”

Dr. Holmes rather congratulated himself that no critic had accused him of writing an improbable story, and took to himself a little more consolation from this fact than the critics would have allowed him. The probability or improbability of a story is, after all, of comparatively slight importance in estimating a book that makes claim to be a work of art, and there were graver faults for the critics to concern themselves with.

The book, however, claims attention when one is speaking of his work as a whole, because

it further emphasises the serious purpose he had in view in writing his books generally, and his novels in particular. Nothing can give us so true and even impressive a sense of his attitude to his work as this quotation from a letter addressed to Mrs. H. B. Stow, in which he speaks of "Elsie Venner" on which he was engaged at the time:—

"I wish," he says, "to write a story with enough of interest in its characters and incidents to attract a certain amount of popular attention. Under cover of this to stir that mighty question of automatic agency in its relation to self-determination. . . . It is conceived in the fear of God and in the love of man. Whether I am able to work out my delicate and difficult problem or not is not of so much consequence. A man may fulfil the object of his existence by asking a question he cannot answer, and attempting a task he cannot achieve."

Before leaving the consideration of the novels, it may be worth while to mention one trifling detail which illustrates the way in which Dr. Holmes so often used his professional knowledge, to heighten the effect of the characters and incidents of his stories. It will be remembered that "Elsie Venner" had a mark upon her neck which she kept carefully covered up; in reading the story we refer this mark, in our mind, to the bite of the snake, and as the story and the life of Elsie progress toward an end, the mark grows fainter as the serpent

nature succumbs to the higher elements of Elsie's being, and at her death it is found that the fateful mark has completely faded away.

It cannot be denied that the idea of “the mark” is a very subtle touch on the part of the author, or rather the way in which it is made suggestive, by being spoken of, and hinted at, and the effect which a knowledge of its presence has upon the heroine. And the complete fading away of the mark is also suggestive: it is more than that—it concludes the story, and without it the death of Elsie would be no satisfactory and full conclusion. A physiological explanation of this detail of the story has recently been given by Mr. Bland Sutton, who suggested that Dr. Holmes, being a medical man, would know how many people are disfigured by a *nævus* upon some part of their body, and he would also know that these blemishes depend upon the capillary circulation for their characteristic appearance, and might therefore grow faint in some conditions of health and be unapparent at death. It was this professional knowledge which Dr. Holmes was able to use in so effective a manner when he conceived “Elsie Venner,” and all his books afford illustrations of the very skilful way the novelist, the essayist and the poet made use of the scientist and the medical man.

CHAPTER IX.

BIOGRAPHER AND TRAVELLER.

We will not speak of years to-night,
For what have years to bring
But larger floods of love and light,
And sweeter songs to sing ?

* * * *

We need not waste our schoolboy art
To gild this notch of time.

THE volumes that have been spoken of in the preceding pages are not the only account that Dr. Holmes gave of himself during the years that are included between the appearance of the "Autocrat" and that of "A Mortal Antipathy."

Once the "Autocrat" had laid the foundation of his reputation, he found himself in great demand. No notable gathering in Boston was complete without him, or without a poem from him, and poems seemed to fly from his pen with a dangerous facility. "I have contributed my share of hilarity to scores of festivals," he says, "and am almost entitled to be called the laureate of our local receptions of great personages, from Prince Albert Edward

downward." His friends and his good nature compelled him to grace all manner of public and private occasions with a copy of verses, and the wonder is that so many of these are worth reading by us, who feel no interest in the particular occasion of them.

I have one trouble I cannot get rid of, namely, that they tease me to write for every conceivable anniversary. . . . You remember Sydney Smith's John Bull, how he "blubbers and subscribes"—I scold and consent.

Many of these poems, perhaps too many, have been included in his collected works; some of them are exceedingly apt, and all of them display his characteristic humour and geniality to some extent.

He also contributed during these years a good many stray essays, both literary and scientific, to various magazines, and most of these that are worth remembrance may be found in the volumes entitled "Medical Essays," "An Old Volume of Life," and "Soundings in the Atlantic." The last of these has not been reprinted, but the best contributions it contains form a part of the "Old Volume of Life." There is no need to speak of these essays at length, but they illustrate in a particular way what has been noticed in speaking of Dr. Holmes' other works, the useful ally the scientist found the man of letters in the "Medical Essays," and the value of the professional

knowledge and experience of the doctor to the author when he was writing of general subjects.

These essays, however, are also interesting as displaying his versatility, and his keen observation, and they give us,—at least, some of them do,—a clearer understanding of his acutely logical mind than could be obtained from his more popular works. It is the recognition of this latter characteristic that is helpful in enabling us to see how it was that a man who seemed at times almost incapable of opposition, should yet have pursued, for so long a time and with such antipathy, some phases of belief and some developments of medical science. The "Medical Essays" contain some passages that are noteworthy by the general reader, and show not only the large and humane view he took of his own profession, but lead us to infer that his scientific training and professional experience is largely accountable for the calm, wise and tolerant attitude he adopted toward life in all its manifestations.

During the years he was living quietly at Boston and writing his books, he cemented many friendships. Lowell, Longfellow, Whittier, Emerson, Motley and James Freeman Clarke were among those he regarded as his especial friends, and with whom he deals intimately; but in addition to the close and

literary friendships which he made, he gathered round him a large circle of men and women who followed the most diverse callings, and were united only in their admiration of him.

These acquaintances had such a high esteem for Dr. Holmes' powers that they were unable to rest contented with his literary work, and urged with some obtuseness that such talents as he possessed should be enlisted in the interest of various public services and aims.

Lowell, to whom we owe a debt for having made Dr. Holmes aware of his literary powers, and for giving him confidence in himself, had attempted earlier in his friend's life to turn his attention to public concerns, and had even reproached him for consciously or unconsciously hindering the cause of the peace, the temperance, and the abolitionist parties; but Lowell failed to make an active propagandist of Dr. Holmes. What Lowell attempted unsuccessfully before the days of the "Autocrat's" fame many urged at a later period, and it is interesting to notice that although there was no aloofness, nothing of the recluse, as we usually understand it, about Dr. Holmes, yet he would not be hindered from living his own life, and allowed no urgency on the part of friends or enemies to engage him in public work for which he wisely felt himself unfitted.

It must not, however, be thought that he was indifferent to public questions: he was keenly alive to them, and had the success of more than one cause at heart, but he was constitutionally incapable of becoming a useful part of the machinery of causes; he hated the dullness of business meetings, and everything connected with organisation, and it must be confessed that he had no great liking for the company of that class of serviceable and indefatigable people who usually attend to such matters.

“I hate being placed on committees,” he says; “they are always having meetings at which half are absent and the rest late. I hate being officially and necessarily in the presence of men, most of whom either from excess of zeal in the good cause or from constitutional obtuseness are incapable of being “bored,” which state is to me the most exhausting.

“I am slow in apprehending parliamentary rules and usages, and averse to the business details many people revel in.

“Some trees grow very tall and straight and large in the forest close to each other, but some must stand by themselves or they won't grow at all. . . .”

Dr. Holmes was troubled at times because he always had to refuse this kind of help to his friends, but he knew that if he engaged in such labours it would have to be at the expense of his own proper work, and he consoled himself and his friends by remarking “that

for every person like himself there were two or three organising, contriving, socialising intelligencies, and three or four self-sacrificing people who had forgotten what they liked, and about a dozen indifferent folk who would take part in anything they were asked to do."

One cause, however, at last stirred his blood and aroused him to public activity. He never really fought with the abolitionists as a party, and it was a long time before his conservative tendencies would allow him to sympathise with them; but the war which commenced in 1861 set his mind working upon the great national issues involved, heated his ever-warm patriotism, and kindled that speech which he delivered in Boston in 1863, and of which the eloquence thrills as one reads it even now. His enthusiasm in this cause may be gathered from his papers entitled "Bread and the Newspaper," and "My Hunt for the Captain," as well as from many passages from his letters; the following quotations are taken from his correspondence with Motley:—

If we have grown unmanly and degenerate in the north wind, I am willing that the sirocco should sweep us off from the soil. . . . But I have a most solid and robust faith in the sterling manhood of the North, in its endurance, its capacity for a military training, its plasticity for every need in education, in political equality, in respect for man as man in peaceful development which is our law, in distinction from aggressive

colonisation, in human qualities as against bestial and diabolical ones, in the Lord as against the Devil. If I never see peace and freedom in this land, I shall have faith that my children will see it. If they do not live long enough to see it, I believe their children will.

And on another occasion he writes :—

The mean sympathisers with the traitors are about in the streets under many aspects. . . . But to meet young men who have breathed this American air without taking the contagious fever of liberty, whose hands lie as cold and flabby in yours as the fins of a fish, on the morning of a victory—this is the hardest thing to bear. Oh ! if the bullets would only go to the hearts that have no warm human blood in them ! But the most generous of our youth are the price that we must pay for the new heaven and the new earth, which are to be born of this fiery upheaval.

Thus the years went by kindly for him, as he lived his comparatively untroubled life in Boston, enjoying his home, meeting his friends, attending the Saturday Club, writing his books, lecturing, and attending with a wonderful patience to his ever-growing correspondence. He spent his summers first at one place and then at another, until toward the end of his life he settled upon Beverly Farm ; but he was always working, there seemed no sign of age in him, he was as energetic as ever, his eye was undimmed, and his powers unabated. The first hint that we have of the coming of old age to him was not that his body and intellect were

failing him, but that his friends were failing him. There were gaps in his circle of acquaintance, and empty chairs at the Saturday Club,—Agassiz died in 1873, and in 1877 Motley followed him.

Dr. Holmes had been fascinated by Motley : “ his impulsive, passionate, ambitious, proud, sensitive, but always interesting friend,” as he calls him, and had admitted him to more intimate relationship than almost any other of his friends, and at Motley’s death the friendship imposed upon Dr. Holmes the task of writing his biography,—a task which he engaged in with zeal and little feeling of disability. The strict limits of biography, however, were restraints peculiarly hampering to his genius, and moreover there were certain aspects of Motley’s life,—the public phases of his career—which Oliver Wendell Holmes’ powers did not qualify him to deal with adequately. He produced not an impartial record and estimate of the life of his friend, but a heightened if an eloquent appreciation, recalling what was best in his features and clothing, his recollections “ in the embroidered garment of memory.”

The life of Motley was finished in 1878, and the next year Dr. Holmes was sharply reminded of his age by the manner in which his publishers celebrated his seventieth birthday.

This anniversary was the occasion of the *Atlantic* breakfast, a great compliment and a great honour to him, perhaps the first notable public recognition of his services to literature.

All the well-known literary men were invited, and Dr. Holmes was eulogised in speech and poem, and received all these marks of appreciation and esteem with undisguised pleasure. In writing to W. D. Howells—now America's foremost man of letters and a veteran, but then in the midst of his career and manager of the "south pole" of this festival—he says :—

Of course I was pleased—how could I help being pleased—with the penetrating and nicely accented praise you awarded me. We know the difference between a smudge of eulogy and a stroke of characterisation.

Writing to Lowell, he says characteristically enough :—

At half-past six p.m. yesterday I got up from a "breakfast" given to me at the Brunswick by the publishers of the *Atlantic*. My friends were there in great force. . . . I look back on all the fine things that were sung and said about me, and feel like a royal mummy just embalmed. The only thing is that in hearing so much about one's self it makes him think he is dead and reading his obituary notices.

The celebration was a great success and a great pleasure to Dr. Holmes ; but although it indicated clearly enough among other things

that his publishers had found him a valuable investment in the past, it was not a hint that they were prepared to see him resign his connection with them without regret, and although the whole affair was a recognition of his genius that sharply reminded him of his years, he felt no inclination to lay down the pen, or doff the professor's gown.

His interest in life and his enjoyment of it were as keen as ever, and his lively temperament, as he says, could not be kept down by the added years or the common burdens of life. So for a little longer he would not disengage himself from any of his duties, and continued his literary work and his medical lectures.

In 1882, his friendships suffered again by the death of Emerson and Longfellow; the boughs must needs be shaken and the other leaves fall, if one would be the "last leaf," and Oliver Wendell Holmes found himself already among the few who remained of the class of 1829, and the friends of his generation in the minority at the Saturday Club. He decided to relieve himself a little, and to curtail his work, in order that what he still had to do should not suffer in quality through his overburdening himself, and in 1882 he resigned his lectureship at Harvard, a position which he had occupied for five-and-thirty years.

“I had a very pleasant opening offered to me,” (by his publishers) he writes, “and as I had had about enough of schoolmastering, I took off my professor’s gown, and now I am in my literary shirt sleeves.”

His resignation was the occasion of something like a demonstration on the part of the students, which has been mentioned, and his farewell address to them contains his first reluctant admission of the effect of age :—

I have helped to wear these stairs into hollows—stairs which I trod when they were smooth and level, fresh from the plane. There are just thirty-two of them as there were five-and-thirty years ago, but they are steeper and harder to climb it seems to me than they were then.

Honours, and a large recognition of his services to medicine and literature gratified him during his last years: everyone was anxious that he should quit the stage amply robed. Harvard University dignified him with a D.C.L. in 1880, and upon his resignation of the Chair of Anatomy he was made Emeritus Professor. The medical faculty of New York fêted him in the spring of the following year, and when he made his tour to Europe in 1886, Cambridge, Oxford and Edinburgh conferred honorary degrees upon him.

Dr. Holmes was very flattered by these honours, and was very susceptible to such distinctions; there was nothing irritating about

his frank enjoyment of the praises and good opinion of his friends and the public recognition of his position as a man of letters ; but it must be recorded as one of his redeeming vices perhaps, that in old age if not in his earlier days, he suffered a little from vanity, that next to last infirmity of noble minds. " I bought me a new silk gown and went to Commencement, and they made me an LL.D.," he wrote to James Russell Lowell, after receiving this distinction from Harvard.

His reception at the English Universities in 1886 was particularly gratifying. At Cambridge the undergraduates saluted him with a new and appropriate version of an old song, and shouted to the echo " Holmes, sweet Holmes," which the doctor was very happy to receive as a tribute. An eye-witness of the ceremony at Oxford quoted by Mr. Morse, says, " But the gallery gods had heartier applause for Dr. Holmes, whose almost boyish countenance told them of the eternal youth in the poet's heart. What a quick response there was from those other hearts up aloft, who knew that the good Doctor would not mind the unbridled licence they enjoy one day in the year. The complimentary address was being read, Dr. Holmes standing in his scarlet finery, but the noise in the gallery was deafening." If the early part of his life had

been vigorous and full of interest because full of work, the latter part was full of honours and sympathy and encouragement, which "cheated the least promising season of life of much that seemed to render it dreary."

The death of Emerson, which we have mentioned as taking place in 1882, was the occasion of his second and last attempt at biographical literature. He had known Emerson for a long while, and counted him a friend, but the natures of these two men did not allow of the closest intimacy between them. It is true to say that Dr. Holmes did not deeply appreciate the philosophy which Emerson's life, as much as his writings, was an expression of, and those who had given themselves up to the admiration of the Concord philosopher, regarded Dr. Holmes as an unsuitable biographer, and looked with some anxiety for his interpretation of their master; and they would have had more occasion for concern if they had known to what a negligible extent Dr. Holmes had been influenced by Emerson, and how little he really knew of his work. This passage quoted by Mr. Morse indicates, as he says, an unpromising attitude for a biographer: "I find the study of Emerson curiously interesting," and "I took it up" (the preparation of a biography) "very reluctantly, having been a late comer as an admirer

of the Concord poet and philosopher. But I have got interested in it, and am reading and studying to get at the true inwardness of this remarkable being and his world."

If studying his subject could have equipped him as a biographer, he would have produced an unimpeachable work, for he spared no pains and left no possible source of information unattempted; and he did, in fact, write a memoir which is far superior to his life of Motley, and which can be read with pleasure not only because it is so redolent of the author, but because it is full of luminous remarks about Emerson and a careful if not complete exposition of his work. But it was not accepted as a good biography, or a full appreciation, and the truth about Dr. Holmes' disability as the author of Emerson's life is perhaps found in this passage from a letter he received from Mr. Hoar:—"I do not believe you have got hold of all there was in Emerson, any more than I thought in his lifetime that he understood all there was in you. Indeed, 'much meditating' these things, I incline to think that a perfect sympathy is only possible in a disciple and admirer—pure and simple—who has no separate gift or quality of his own." It would not be fair to suggest that this correspondent or the reading public had no praise for this work: it was, in fact, well received

in some quarters, and has been largely read, but the following sentence, taken with the quotation above, perhaps represents the opinion of those who were capable of estimating the value of Dr. Holmes' attempt:—"I think the book is admirably done, and will be of the greatest value in making Emerson's public and your public—so far as they are not the same—better acquainted."

Dr. Holmes' biography has been the occasion of some excellent essays, and it is perhaps worth mentioning those by Augustine Birrell and John Morley, the latter of whose study of Emerson is likely to give the reader a better appreciation of the man and philosopher than Dr. Holmes' biography.

CHAPTER IX.

“THE LAST LEAF.”

Then Old Age said again : Come let us walk down the street together—and offered me a cane, an eyeglass and a tippet, and a pair of overshoes. No, much obliged to you, said I, I don't want those things, and I had a little rather talk to you here, privately in my study. So I dressed myself up in a jaunty way and walked out alone ; got a fall ; caught a cold and was laid up with lumbago, and had time to think over this whole matter.

—*The Professor's Paper.*

DURING a long life, Dr. Holmes had been spared much suffering or much sorrow ; his days had followed one another easily and pleasantly, and though there had been plenty of hard work, he had beside the enjoyment which comes from a keen interest in one's particular work, that other relish and stimulus which results from hearty appreciation of it by one's contemporaries.

But Dr. Holmes lived too long to be exempted from pressing sorrow : death had beckoned many of his friends, but their places were partly taken by the new friends his winning personality was always attracting to him,

and it was not until 1884 that the shadow feared by man fell athwart his own hearth and rested on his son Edward.

“It seems to me,” he wrote, “that I have been living with sorrow of late—grief of my own and that of others. The loss of my son Edward comes back to me every day as I think of all that life promised him if he could but have had the health to enjoy it.”

But neither this bereavement nor those that he suffered soon after, were able to spoil his last years. He bowed beneath every stroke that fell, but his fine nature would not allow him to be broken by them, and the effect of his private sorrow is chiefly seen in the gracious spirit that informs his letters of sympathy to those who were suffering from similar bereavement. Writing to one friend who had lost a child, he says :—

How can one “comfort” another under such an affliction as yours? Not certainly by phrases—rather by those assurances of sympathy which all hearts ask in their supreme moments of trial. . . . There are no graves that grow so green as the graves of children. Their memory comes back after a time more beautiful than that of those who leave us at any other age, because life has not had time to strip them of those “clouds of glory” they come trailing with them “from Heaven which is their home.”

Grief, added to the number of his years, made him begin to experience his age, so to speak. He noted, too, his failing sight, his less acute

sense of hearing ; and was overcome now and again with a sense of loneliness when he recollected the many he set out with and the few that walked beside him now. But his buoyant nature always reasserted itself, and to the last he felt he had still some work to do ; and moreover he never forgot the compensations of old age.

“Grow old, my dear boys, grow old !” he wrote to some of his friends. “Your failings are forgotten ; your virtues are over-rated ; there is just enough of pity in the love that is borne you to give it a tenderness all its own. The horizon line of age moves forward by decades. At sixty, seventy seems to bound the landscape ; at seventy, the eye rests on the line of eighty ; at eighty we can see through the mist, and still in the distance, a ruin or two of ninety.”

This was written in 1885, the year in which he produced “A Mortal Antipathy,” which has been mentioned.

The following year, in company with his daughter, he made a memorable tour.

“After an interval of more than fifty years,” he said, “I propose taking a second look at some parts of Europe. It is a Rip Van Winkle experiment which I am promising myself.”

It certainly seemed a daring adventure for an asthmatical old gentleman of seventy-seven years of age, but it proved one of the most pleasant episodes in his life. What he

really did was to make not a tour through Europe, but a triumphal march through the halls of London society: he was welcomed, courted, fêted, praised, wherever he went, and he was free to go wherever he wished. The record of his doings in London and elsewhere during his trip is to be found in "Our Hundred Days in Europe," which he published on his return home, and in which he recalls every incident with boyish relish, and shows an excessive anxiety to express his gratitude. The welcome he received certainly did credit to the English people whom he had not been ready to appreciate in his early days, but to whom he made amends both before and after his last tour.

When he returned home and had satisfied his anxiety to be grateful enough by publishing "Our Hundred Days," he engaged in his last literary project and commenced the series of papers entitled "Over the Tea Cups." The death of his wife saddened this year, and so affected his health as to make work impossible. His papers to the *Atlantic* were discontinued for some months, but he eventually settled down to complete them, and had scarcely done so when his only daughter died. Writing to some friends, who had expressed their appreciation of his last work, he says:—

I am living just as when you were here, but the loss of my daughter is not one to be made good in this life.

. . . The way in which the tea-cups was received was very gratifying, but oh ! if only those whom I have lost could have shared my satisfaction. I do not expect to write any more books.

The years dealt very gently with Oliver Wendell Holmes from this time until his death : every day brought fresh witness of his great reputation, everybody was anxious to be of service to him, and what helped him most of all was his quiet determination to be thankful for all he had been enabled to do and enjoy, and be patient and even cheerful under anything he might have to endure.

When James Freeman Clarke died, he said in writing to a friend :—

We cannot disguise the fact—the keystone of our arch has slid and fallen, and all we can do is to lean against each other until the last stone is left standing alone. But we must not come together, such of us as are left, for tears and lamentations. If the meetings are not cheerful and hopeful, they will be looked forward to with pain instead of pleasure.

When they did meet in the next year, the year of his eightieth birthday, Dr. Holmes contributed his customary poem and a cheerful presence, so that the meeting of the six old men who were left from the class of 1829 went off “pretty well,” as he says. He wrote to Whittier just after his birthday celebrations this year :—

Here I am at your side among the octogenarians. At seventy we are objects of veneration : at eighty of curiosity.

These few quotations will indicate the spirit and cheerfulness with which he accepted, and even prosecuted the life of every day that was still given him. To Mrs. Kellogg he wrote :—

I go to the symphony rehearsals, and to a five o'clock tea once in a while. I dine out at long intervals, everybody of my generation being dead, pretty much,—my two young people go to the theatre together—but I rarely accompany them. Once in a while we all dine at some public table—Young's or Parker's—just for the fun of it, and by way of change. Mrs. Judge knows how to make me comfortable, and does it wonderfully well. But I grow lazy . . . Yet when I talk of laziness I am really kept very busy. Here I am writing to you at 4.30 p.m. this Saturday : ten to one the door-bell will ring in the course of the next fifteen minutes, and a school-ma'am from Oshkosh, or an author from Dakota, or a poetess from Belchertown will come in and interrupt me.

When he was eighty-three he wrote :—

I am reading right and left—whatever turns up, but especially re-reading old books. Two new volumes of Dr. Johnson's letters have furnished me part of my reading.

He was also employed during this year in writing his autobiography, and found living over his past life and putting on record, the

most easy and enjoyable of literary labours, but he was unable to proceed very far with this work.

The year before his death he wrote :—

My birthday found me very well in body, and I think in mind. . . . I am only reasonably deaf; my two promising cataracts are so slow about their work that I begin to laugh at them . . . and I can see with both my eyes and read with one; and my writer's cramp is very considerate, and is letting me write without interference, as you can see. . . . I wrote a hymn a few months ago.

Every birthday as it came brought an avalanche of letters and tokens of regard, and it was after his last birthday that he wrote :—

I am scattering thanks right and left—from hands as full as they can hold. Your kind expressions are very grateful to me. They do me good—old age at best is lonely, and the process of changing one's whole suit of friends and acquaintances has its moments when one feels naked and shivers. . . . I have been contemplating the leafless boughs and the brown turf in the garden of my memory.

Less than a month after writing this letter he died quietly, without pain and without suffering of any kind, just slipping out of one life into another.

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

I strove with none, for none was worth my strife ;
Nature I loved, and after Nature Art.
I warmed both hands before the fire of life ;
It sinks, and I am ready to depart.

—*Landor.*

IT is difficult when considering the quiet and uneventful life of Oliver Wendell Holmes, to recollect that he lived in stirring times, and through one of the most remarkable half centuries of our history ; but when we do remember this fact, and turn to his most characteristic work, we find striking evidence of it in almost every page.

A passage taken from his introduction to "Our Hundred Days" brings vividly before us the changes that took place during the half century that separated his two visits to Europe :—

I left the England of William the Fourth, of the Duke of Wellington, of Sir Robert Peel. I went from

Manchester to Liverpool by the new railway—the only one I saw in Europe. I looked upon England from the box of a stage-coach,

and then he goes on to say with what pleasure he should tell some wise men of the past of the ocean steamers—of the railroads that spread themselves like cobwebs over the civilised and half-civilised portions of the earth—the telephone—the telegraph—the photograph and the spectrum :—

I should hand him a paper with the morning news from London to read by the electric light ; I should startle him with a friction match ; I should amaze him with the incredible truths about anæsthesia ; I should astonish him with the latter conclusions of geology ; I should confound him with the revolutionary apocalypse of Darwinism. All this change in the aspects, position, beliefs of humanity since the date of my own graduation from College.

It is necessary to remember this when speaking of Oliver Wendell Holmes, because his literary instrument is as much the product of this half century as the railway and the telegraph ; and, moreover, although his point of view was American, and he was national in this sense, and although he was intensely provincial, yet his ideas and his whole estimate of life and what appears most original and characteristic about his way of enforcing these, belongs not to America, or England, or Oliver Wendell Holmes, but to the nineteenth century

and his intuitive apprehension of its bearing.

His attitude to religion illustrates this perfectly well, for much that he was abused for uttering upon this subject in his early career could be freely spoken of in the drawing-room in his later life, and has become part of our creed to-day, and the whole of the creed of a great body of people. He accepted and taught willingly and almost instinctively what has taken nearly a century to gain a reluctant acceptance.

There is no need at this time of day to justify Dr. Holmes' challenge to an attitude of mind considered the most devout, but stigmatised by him as degrading, and to dogmas that seemed both stupid and cruel; but it is as well to remind the reader that Holmes himself was a deeply religious, even devout man, that he never attacked Christianity itself, nor do his works ever betray that bitter and narrow scepticism which is too often intolerant of good and bad alike.

What Dr. Holmes waged war against was gloom; as Stevenson said, Zola was fundamentally at enmity with joy, so Oliver Wendell Holmes was fundamentally at variance with gloom, whether it was Puritan gloom, or the gloom of the pessimist, or the gloom that many allowed the sad vicissitudes of life to shadow them with, and he sought to disperse shadows

by the warmth and brightness of his personality as well as by his reason and imagination. It was inevitable, therefore, from the time and place and manner of his birth and upbringing, that he would challenge the paralysing gloom and the harsh prejudice that still lingered in the New England atmosphere, and it was equally inevitable that many good men should mistake the direction of his antagonism and regard him as an enemy of Christianity. What he really attacked was "anything that is brutal, cruel, heathenish, that makes life hopeless for the most of mankind, and perhaps for entire races; anything that assumes the necessity of the extermination of instincts which were given to be regulated, no matter by what name you call it, no matter whether a fakir, a monk or a deacon believes it." He considered that a man who did not attack, but held and believed such things ought to be incapable of retaining both his reason and his faith. He had no wish to remit one iota of religious truth; what he was concerned about was that his generation should be content to remain within the religious confines of the partial and narrow construction of a preceding age. He only said, in his own somewhat startling way, what all men are prepared to say to-day, namely that every generation must restate in its own terms and reconstruct

by its own light and knowledge its religion as well as its science. He urged men to exercise their faith not only by worship but by doubt and investigation, so that that healthy, vital change which takes place in bodies and sloughs off what is dead and useless might also take place in religion.

His own creed in so far as he had one was the first two words of the Pater Noster, and he would admit nothing that denied directly or by implication the Fatherhood of God. Writing to Mrs. Stowe, he tried with indifferent success to formulate his beliefs, and the following quotations indicate clearly the basis of his hope and of his religious life.

That it is more consonant with our ideas of what is best to suppose that suffering, which is often obviously disciplinary and benevolent in its aim, is to be temporary rather than eternal.

That the Deity must be as good as the best conscious being He makes.

That if the Deity expects the genuine love and respect of independent thinking creatures, He must in the long run treat them as a good father would treat them.

It was suffering that troubled his faith more than anything else,—not his own but that of others—and toward the end of his life he said if he lived to be a few years older he would be nothing but pity. To the friend to whom he said this, he wrote :—

To you I suppose sin is the mystery—to me suffering is. I trust Love will prove the solution of both. At any rate no atomic philosophy can prevent my hoping that it will prove so.

It is true that he eventually applied his belief in hereditary and pre-natal influence so as almost to exclude the idea of sin from his estimate of life, and though he never was deserving of the low abuse he received in consequence, he cannot claim even to-day the support of either Science or Christianity in doing so.

The Unitarian revival was in full swing during his early days, and its influence upon him is very marked,—it coloured his whole outlook,—and he adhered to the Unitarian body more or less during his entire life: but he often attended other places of worship, and used to say that no door was too narrow to admit him to worship. Writing to Phillips Brooks, he says :—

My natural Sunday home is King's Chapel, where a good and amiable and acceptable preacher tries to make us better with a purity and sincerity which we admire and love. In that Church I have worshipped half a century. . . . There on the fifteenth of June, 1840, I was married; there my children were all christened; from that Church the dear companion of so many blessed years was buried. In her seat I must sit, and through its door I hope to be carried to my resting-place.

It is well to think that before his death all misunderstanding had ceased, and all good men were agreed in regarding him not as an antagonist but as a protagonist; and those who were forbidden in their childhood to read the "Autocrat" because of its irreligious tendencies, were willing to hand it to their own children with pleasure.

Oliver Wendell Holmes will occupy a considerable place in the history of American literature, because he developed a new vein; but it is likely that most of his works will cease to be read before long, because they are not sufficiently the work of an artist to endure after the lessons they were mainly written to teach have been accepted, and it is everywhere evident that much that Oliver Wendell Holmes sought to enforce has by his efforts as well as by the inevitable trend of the times, gained acceptance. But the "Autocrat" will probably remain, because it belongs to that class of books which have the power of making a man suddenly aware of himself and the universe, and there are many who would mention the reading of the "Autocrat" as the occasion of a kind of mental conversion or new birth. As there are certain substances in the animal organism whose peculiar function is to produce activity in secretions that would otherwise remain inert, so there are certain books which

seem to have a similar power in respect to latent intellect ; they do more than stimulate—they liberate the mind, and leave a man a new creature.

This perhaps may account for the fact that such a book as the "Autocrat," to those whom it has influenced in the way that has been mentioned, appears almost a dull book upon a second or a third reading. It has accomplished its work so rapidly, has been assimilated at once and has nothing further to teach. Of course, it is not to all readers that the "Autocrat" comes in this way, and probably its influence depends partly upon the reader,—his age and the condition of his mind,—but it certainly has the power of bringing some minds suddenly, as it seems, to awakeness and independence.

No further discussion of Dr. Holmes' works must be entered upon here, however ; the question of how long an "immortality" an author may achieve by his writings is of no importance compared to the character of his influence, and Dr. Holmes is as likely to live by virtue of the influence alluded to in this quotation as by any degree of art or scholarship or originality which his books denote.

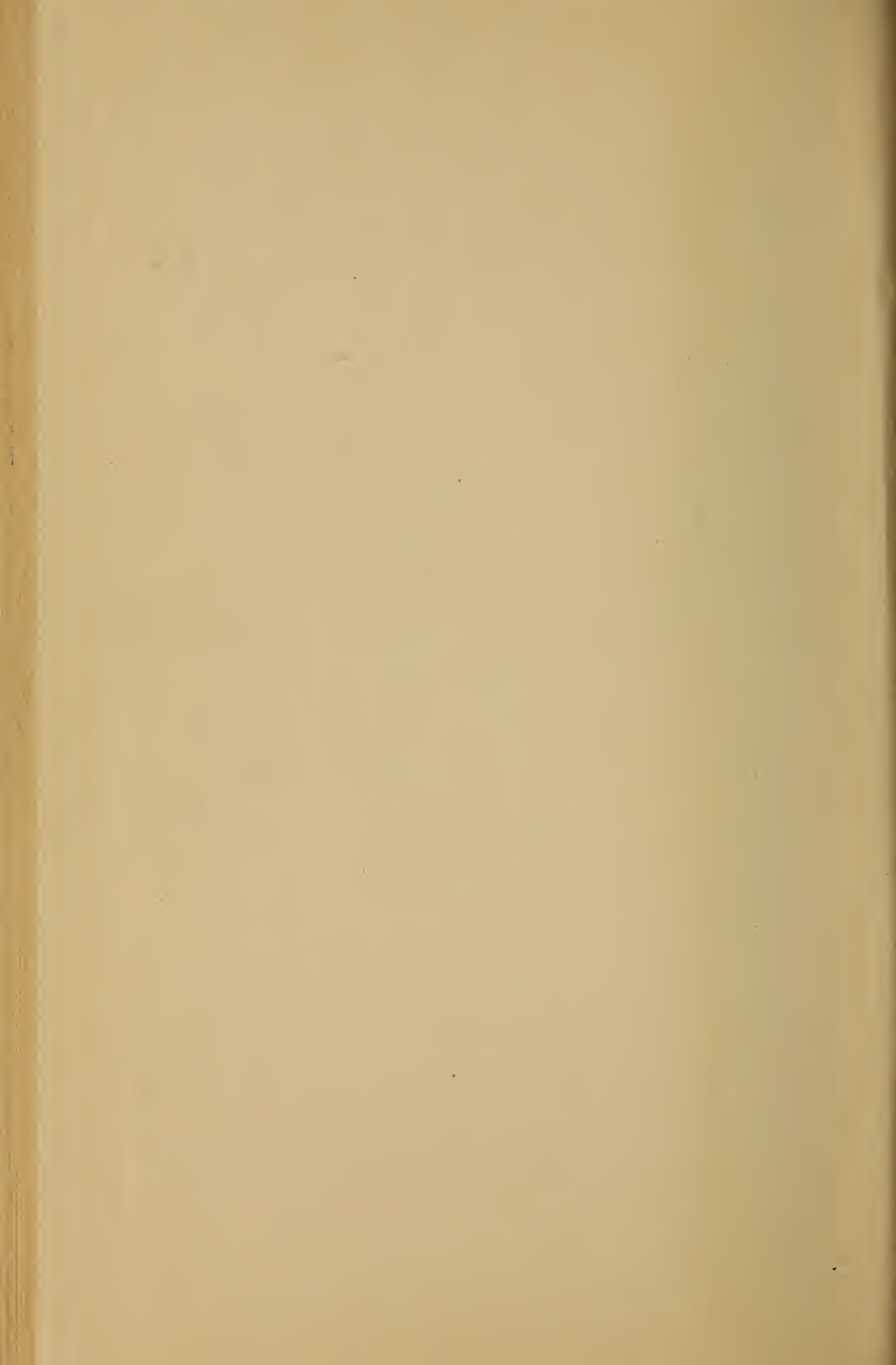
I do not know what to make of it sometimes when I receive a letter, it may be, from Oregon or Omaha, from England or Australia, telling me I have unlocked

the secret chamber of some heart which others infinitely more famous and infinitely more entitled to claim the freedom have failed to find opening for them. This has happened to me so often from so many different persons—men and women, young and old—that I cannot help believing there is some human tone in my written voice, which sometimes finds a chord not often set vibrating.

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